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ENCHANTED
GROUND



HARRY JAMES SMITH

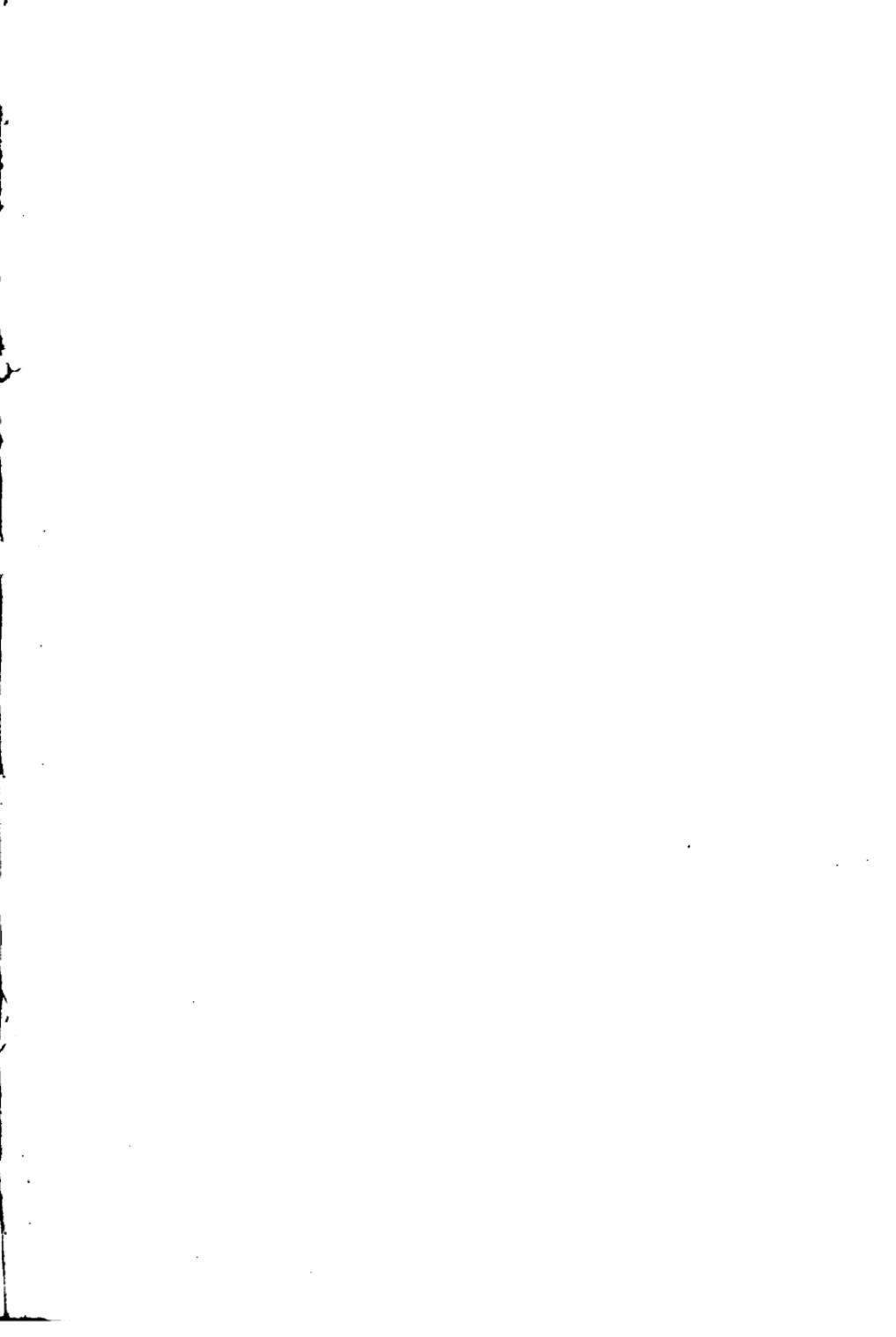
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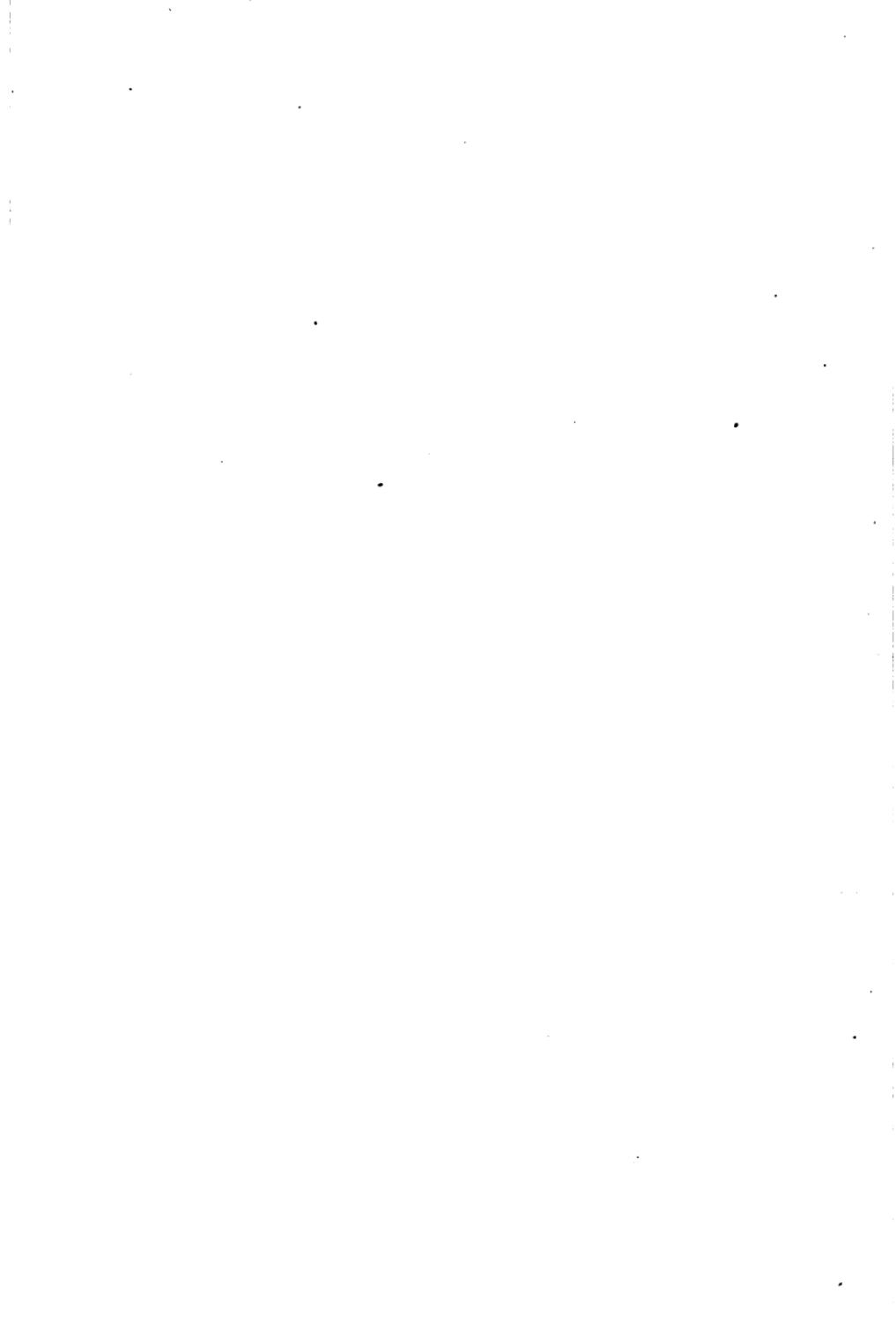


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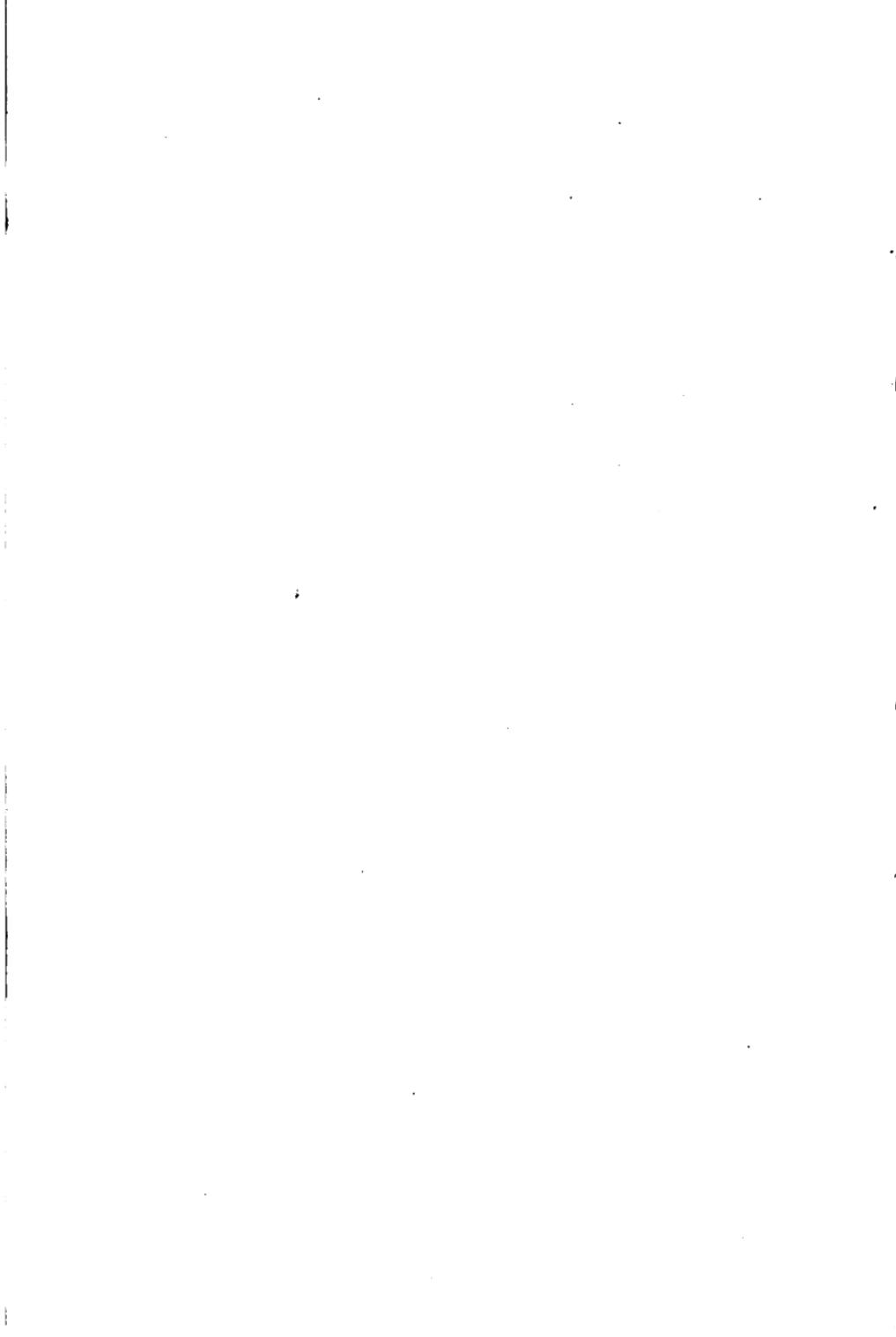
FROM

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By exchange
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ENCHANTED GROUND
AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A
YOUNG MAN



ENCHANTED GROUND

AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE
OF A YOUNG MAN

BY

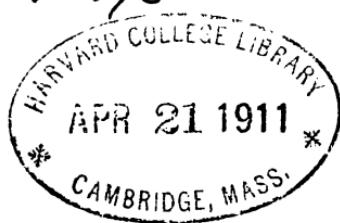
HARRY JAMES SMITH

Author of "Ambrose's Son"



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1910

AL 3455.5.75



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Published August 1910

ENCHANTED GROUND



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I

WHERE the rivers meet the sea stands the City. The great ships come to her from the four corners of the earth; they wait, straining at the leash, innumerable, along her proud shores. Over bridges that hang, like dream-phantoms, high above the waters, through tunnels that plunge deep below the waters, where no living thing ever moved before, she draws in her countless hosts of toil. The sun, lifting his head out of the deep, hangs shields of gold upon the fretted windows of her soaring towers, and flings his javelins of splendour against her domes and pinnacles.

In her teeming streets all nations of men traffic with one another. The rich and the hungry poor are jostled together. Poverty and nakedness stare with wild eyes from her noisome alleys; wealth such as the Orient never knew is daily amassed, daily dispensed, in her markets. It is a City of Power, a City of consuming Ambition, a Babel that would ravish heaven of its secret and silence.

It is a City of Youth. Like the fabled bird of Arabia, she renews herself in the ashes of her past. Age is

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cast off and forgotten. Age has no place in her schemes of power. But Youth — how ravenously she reaches forth to seize it, and to draw it to herself. Youth it is, everlasting Youth, that feeds her dreams, that rears her towers yet higher, flings yet wider her bridges, and piles up her wealth until there is no counting thereof for its immensity.

Thither go the young men, with the hope and dream of the future in their eyes. They come down to her out of the land of hills and from the broad plains, irresistibly drawn by her fair promises; and there is no going back. While Youth lasts, the City does not release them from her spells.

Her spells are Ambition and Opportunity. It is these that make light for Youth the burden of labour, that cause sacrifice and hardship to be welcomed, that strengthen him to face disappointment, neglect, and loneliness. Pleasure also has her palace there, and sings her magical song in the ears of Youth. In the garish, never-sleeping streets of night she walks abroad, attired with witcheries, casting a glamour upon his eyes. And in the City, far from the Land of Hills, here, where the ties of the old life are relaxed or broken, what shall restrain the feet of Youth from following after?

The City is the place of testing. She is lavish of opportunity; equally lavish of seduction. She preaches strength and endurance, and she preaches indul-

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gence and forgetfulness. In her streets you may hearken to all the jangled, conflicting voices of human life, and you may obey those you will. In the City, Youth is privileged, nay, compelled, as nowhere else to make his own decisions, to choose his own courses. Here it is that he comes preëminently to his own, stripped of all hampering traditions, released from all surveillance, hurled relentlessly into the very presence of the true gods and the false,—to choose. It is for him to find himself here, or to lose himself, as he will.

Only, to guide him, he brings with him to the City of the Test, like the Pilgrim, equipped for his long journey of struggle, temptation, and victory, a scroll in his bosom. A seal, too, has been set upon his brow; and to his ears has the warning been confided, by those wise shepherds of the mountains, that he should not sleep upon the Enchanted Ground.

II

It had for a moment threatened to be a grave accident; but thanks to the courage and address of one of the passers-by, this outcome had been averted. Without an instant's hesitation he had leaped into the midst of the tangle of frightened horses, and succeeded in freeing the tongue of the coupé from the heavy pole of the lumber truck, over which it had become firmly locked by the pole-chains. Seizing the bridles of the rearing chestnuts, he had held them from backing the carriage across the sidewalk into a cellar excavation, and had afforded the red-faced Hibernian drayman a chance to get his team under control, haul them off, and continue on his way, still noisily ejaculating strange imprecations. Then the young man had brought the coupé once more into the street, and led up the chestnuts alongside the curb.

He was talking to them in a soothing, familiar voice, and patting their superbly arched necks with a confidence and gentle authority that the animals were quick to recognize. Their quivering flanks grew quiet, the dilated nostrils relaxed; and finally, when he drew temptingly from his pocket two lumps of sugar, they were soon nibbling out of his palms like old pets.

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As he stood there below the curb, he seemed utterly oblivious of the little inconglomerate throng of spectators swiftly assembled on the sidewalk, oblivious too of the sheepishly grinning coachman, who had reappeared from nobody knew where and was fussily examining the harness. The warm breath of the horses on his hands, and the caressing eagerness of their damp noses had transported him far from city streets. With his luxuriant black poll bent close to the cheek of the nigh mare, he was affectionately combing out her forelock with his fingers and talking to her in the wheedling, foolish, delightful way of mothers to babies and sweethearts to one another.

It was the voice of a woman that recalled him with a certain shock to the situation of the moment.

“Oh! you must let me say thank you to you for your brave, splendid act. Oh, it was wonderful! How did you ever, *ever* have the courage?”

With a flush of quick embarrassment the young man looked up, to see her standing on the curbing in a shimmering afternoon toilette of pale olive; and the same glance informed him with dismay of his own bespattered appearance.

“Oh!” he stammered, “it was n’t anything, honestly,—not if a man happens to know horses.”

Instinctively raising his hand to lift his hat, he discovered that he had lost it. It lay unrecognizable in the gutter at his feet.

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"I thought I was going to be killed," she went on, with an odd, beguiling accent that was not in the least American. "The horses get frightened somehow back there. They start to run. When I see Thomas jump I hide my face,—oh, I was paralyze' with fright!—and the next I know, there is a crash, and I feel the carriage tip, and know it is going back, back across the sidewalk."

She turned a shuddering look toward the excavation behind them; then fixed her eyes, filled with quick tears of gratitude, on the young man's face.

"Oh, how can I ever, *ever* thank you!" she exclaimed in a low, smothered voice. — "I was going to be *there!*"

At the first sight of her mud-spattered, hatless rescuer, she had half opened her purse; but something — an undisguisable distinction — in the man's face and manner had already caused her to shut it again. The little group of spectators, evoked in an instant from nowhere in particular, had already dispersed, and the two were left to themselves.

"It's thanks enough," said the young fellow, "to have had this chance to make friends with your lovely horses. I noticed them last Saturday in the Park, and I noticed too that your driver did n't know how to handle them."

The coachman coughed deprecatingly as he buckled a girth into another hole.

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“But I’m going to attend to that,” she answered, exhibiting a small, resolute fist. “I don’t intend to have my poor little bones risked again. But come, you must let me drive you home at all events. You’ll feel more comfortable than afoot.”

“Behind him? Not down in my part of town,” declared the young man sturdily, while his dark eyes danced. “I think you’d better let me get into his uniform and take *you* home. It would be safer.”

“Oh, for that, I live right near by,” she returned. “I’d only started out. Come, give me the honour of your company; and I promise to fit you up with a new hat and a pair of gloves. I know my husband’s will go you to perfection. And then you may travel where you like.”

The young man surveyed himself with a rueful smile. “I own I should feel more at ease,” he said, “with my clothes brushed and a hat on.”

“Then you’ll come?” she urged.

She turned to the coachman, who had regained his seat and wore the imperturbable look of a man always on duty.

“Listen, Thomas,” she directed, in a low but peremptory voice. “You’re to drive straight back home again; and mind you don’t do anything foolish, or you’ll be sorry. I’m very, *very* angry at you.”

“Very well, ma’am,” replied the driver, with perfect professional unction.

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The young man handed his companion into the carriage, and she gathered her skirts a little closer to make room for him beside her. There was a frank, captivating familiarity in her manner that quite relieved him of the embarrassment he would ordinarily have experienced under such circumstances. The carriage turned about and began to retrace its course northward.

“Oh, you have a bruise on your temple,” cried the woman in her delicious foreign-sounding voice. She put the tip of a white-gloved finger to it. “Does it hurt much, — *hé*?” she asked, solicitously.

The man felt his nerves tingle at the light touch.

“On my word,” he replied, as offhandedly as possible, “I would n’t even know I had it.”

“But it might grow worse, for all that,” she observed, ingenuously, with a series of confirmatory nods. “Listen. I think I shall have to do it up for you in vinegar and brown paper. Would you not like that, — *hé*?”

The young man looked into her changeful, impish eyes, narrowed between golden lashes that flickered; and they both laughed, like children at play.

“By all means,” he agreed. “And if your husband’s hat does not fit me, you will doubtless lend me one of yours. Oh, I shall get home in excellent shape, I am sure.”

“Ah, but the hat will fit, my dear. I can tell.” She

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looked at his head critically. "You must wear a seven, — *he?*" She always brought out her little interrogatory syllable with a sort of bird-like chirp that was irresistible.

"I do," he answered, laughing.

"But that is my dear, dear Frederic's size," she affirmed, with another series of emphatic nods that made the white and green plumes on her hat brush his cheek lightly. "And his gloves, — I do not know the size; but look, spread out your hand — so! Oh, yes, they will fit, I give you my word. Ah, but your hands are very artistic. Are you an artist, my frien'?"

"Only an impecunious young architect," answered her companion.

"Ah, well, it is all the same," she declared. "Is not the architecture an art? But for Frederic — it is too bad he will not be at home to-day. He is always away somewhere on these long business trips, you see." She fingered her muff demurely.

"You must miss him very much," were the words that came, quite unpremeditatedly, from the young man's lips. His manner had the same apparent ingenuousness as hers.

He looked at her, and saw her purse her mobile lips the least bit in the world, while she dug two fingers into the depths of the silver-furred muff.

"Oh, *very*," she murmured, not raising her eyes.

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"Very, very much." The innuendo was just detectible in the little drawl of her utterance.

"And then, you would admire him, too," she went on, naively. "He is just as beautiful and handsome-looking, my dear, as — as what am I going to say? — as one of these models — dummies, you know, — *he*? — you see in the window of a clothier's. I always say to him,

"'Frederic, my cherub, you should go into comic opera. You would make your fortune as the tenor.'

"To be sure, he cannot sing; but what difference does that make, nowadays; and besides, I am sure there is more money in it than in these races. Don't you think so, my frien'?' — But wait, I am going to show you Frederic's picture, and then you can tell better."

She opened a jewelled locket that hung from her neck, flecked her web of a handkerchief across it, and turned it to his gaze.

"There!" she said. "I will make you introduce'. Frederic, my dear, this is the noble young gentleman who rescue my life, Mister — What is your name, my frien'?'"

She looked at him with demure seriousness.

"Wetherell," he replied, "Philip Wetherell, at your service."

"Ved— Wederell," — She made a pucker of despair at the Saxon consonants. "Oh, what a name!"

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Say, that is very, very American, — *he?* Well, Mr. Wet'rell, this is my husband, Mr. Frederic Orlando Murchard Brace. Look at him. Is he not a treasure, then?"

Her companion had to bend very close in order to get a good view of the miniature.

"It flatters him a ver' little," she commented, with a regretful shake of the head. "One must admit, you know, that his nose is becoming too red. I suppose it is the sun-burn. That is what he tells me. Is not the sun hot in New Orleans and those places down there?"

"I have heard so," was the sage reply.

"I tell him, 'Frederic, my dear, you must have a little par'sol made for your nose, — you see, so!'" — She shaped it with her fingers — "'like this, with two little wings that would look like a butterfly quite naturally alighted on it. You must save your complexion, my chile,' I say, 'or those nice Creole girls will not fall in love with you any more. And what would you do then?'"

She closed the locket with the ghost of a sigh; then flung herself back with abandon into the deep-cushioned seat.

"That is the kind of husband I like," she concluded, crisply, with a short, descriptive gesture. — "He make no trouble for you at all. He says, 'Look, my dear Katrinka, I go my way, and I do not

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kick if you go yours,' — and so we rest always, oh, such good frien's. — Look, my man, here we are arrive', at last. Now you come with me and I fit you to a fine hat and some lovely, lovely gloves."

The coupé had come to a stop before a pretentious apartment hotel on one of the avenues northward from the Park. The door was opened.

"You wait one little second, Mr. Wet'erell," said his companion, "while I have one word with my curse of a coachman."

Once outside, the young man was irresistibly drawn again to the horses' heads. He petted the lovely creatures with enamoured admiration, and found another lump of sugar for each of them. He felt singularly elated, without quite knowing why.

"You like animals, — *hé?*" asked his friend, joining him shortly.

He gave her a radiant smile. "When I was a youngster," he said, "I used to live on a horse's back. These are beauties."

"Listen," she said, with a little touch of diffidence that flattered him: "some day, — would you like it? — we have them put to a nice little cart, just you and me, and we go for a lovely, lovely drive in the Park. Would you not like that, *hé?*"

She was leading the way into the hotel, and he followed her, observing for the first time the supple coquetry of her figure. Every movement seemed

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alive, individually expressive. Her small foot, shod in green suede, set itself with elastic firmness and precision on the pavement. There was something compact, resilient, magnetic about her physique that waylaid the imagination.

She nodded affably to the coloured door-boy, who brought out an admiring, "Howdy, Mis' Brace. Say, but you sho look *de-licious!*!" and they entered the elevator.

"Dat nigger," declared the elevator-boy, as he pushed the crank, "he suttenly mus' have a bug, Mis' Brace. I tell him he gwine get kicked out o' dis yer place for sho if he talk that-a-way to a lady. He's too familiyah, that's what he sho is, ma'm."

The woman laughed in perfect good humour. "But I'm afraid you're one little bit jealous, Alexander," she said. "Do you think it's wrong for him to tell me the truth? Or perhaps *you* think different?"

The darkey beamed above serried ivories. "Me think different? Oh, Lordy, Mis' Brace! You suttenly is the mos' beautiful lady in this whole universal city."

"Ah, that's good," she laughed. "Now I'm sure of it. There, Alexander, there's something for telling the truth. Always tell the truth, and some day you'll go to darkey heaven."

She slipped a coin into his pocket as they emerged from the elevator on the ninth floor.

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Wetherell recognized in the easy familiarity of her demeanour the self-confidence of one perfectly habituated to deference from the other sex. In many women there would have been a needful taint of effrontery in such facile camaraderie; in her it was only an additional fascination.

They were admitted to a luxuriously furnished apartment by a middle-aged, discreet-visaged person whom she addressed as Susan.

“Oh, such a time, Susan, my dear!” she cried: “I came within a hair of losing my precious little life. Oh, I never had such a fright, I swear to you! And this is the young man that rescue me. Don’t you feel ver’, ver’ grateful to him? — There, that’s a dear.”

She tossed her hat nonchalantly into the woman’s hands, threw off her furs, and sank with a sigh of fatigue into a deep chair.

“Susan, will you bring us a little pot of tea, like a good soul? And oh, I’m so glad you have lighted the fire. I never was so done up since the day I was bore, I swear to you!” She added some directions in a language that was strange to her companion’s ears.

“Perhaps,” suggested Wetherell, audaciously, “she might bring me a clothes-brush. I should truly like to present a somewhat more respectable appearance.”

Without lifting her head from the back of the chair, Katrinka gave him a languidly critical regard.

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“Oh, you look ver’ charming, my dear,” she averred, impersonally. “An artist would admire you much better like this than with all the character brushed and smoothed out of you. Your hair is positively splendid. It looks like the under side of the wing of a—what do you call one of those things in English? — *krage* is the word in Danish. *Corbeau*? No, that’s French.”

“How about crow?” laughed Wetherell.

“Ye-es,” she agreed. “That is it. Crow. I can see blue in it, even,— indigo! And such a nice horsey smell! No, you shall sit down first and get rested while you are still my brave chevalier.— Say, have you Italian blood in you? Surely your eyes came from Naples! Oh, you could be *terrible* if you were angry;” she repeated the word with a prolonged trill; “*ter-r-reeble!*”

Susan entered with the tray; and the tea was poured. “See, and there goes a wee dash of joy into yours,” she said. “You may have more if you like.”

They sat most cosily before the fire, sipping and smoking and chatting. The young man felt immensely at ease, as he watched her over the rim of his cup, and laughed at her incessantly delightful originalities of speech and facial expression.

No, she was not exactly beautiful; but there was a spell about her that dazzled him more from minute to minute. Her skin was quite colourless, of exquisite

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texture, with an elusive, transparent radiancy, over blue veins, faintly visible; and her small but wondrously mobile features were set off by coiled hair of a glinting grey-brown, instinct, like her lustrous skin, with an elusive vitality, and of a web-like fineness, — masses of it, only half subjugated to braid and nacre comb, and strangely enmeshing the light, either the cold, white November daylight, in which she might have been a sprite from some storied forest, or the ruddy flickerings of the wood-fire that transformed her into an enchantress of the Venusberg.

“And now tell me,” she said, “oh, *wonder* of a man, what happy, happy chance brought you to that *particular* corner of West Central Park at that *particular* moment this afternoon when little Katrinka was going to be hurled into that big cellar?”

She drew up her feet under her like a little forest animal, and lighted another cigarette.

“T is a short and simple tale,” responded the man, setting down his empty cup with something of a flourish. “But such as it is, you shall have it. For it came to pass that the partner in a certain architectural firm was dead, after many months; and therefore unto all the employés — draughtsmen, stenographers, nay, even bell-boys — was a half-day of mourning accorded. And one and all gladly went forth to enjoy themselves. And a certain draughtsman, being but

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newly come to the city and still destitute of friends, had wandered from his lowly abode in Greenwich Village to take the air in the Park, tease the squirrels, and watch the horses. He has left the Elevated; already he has turned his steps toward the East. Lo, a sound of runaway hoofs, a crash, a commotion, curses, plunging steeds! —”

“Splendid, my dear! *Admirable!*” cried his auditor, clasping her hands dramatically. “I see it all again. The driver gone! The coupé going back, back, *bump!* — tipping over oh, frightfully! — and inside there, a white face and a crouching form, — that’s me, — *he* — believing that the end of the world had come, sure, sure. And then a firm, brave, manly voice; a hand at the bridles — Oh, my splendid hero!”

She sprang with impetuous abandon from her chair, touched her fingers lightly to his shoulders, and kissed him.

“There, you won’t refuse that poor little token of gratitude from Katrinka Brace, will you, mon petit?” she laughed, as she danced out of the room. — “Now I’m going to hunt for the gloves and the hat.”

Philip Wetherell caught his breath, and sat motionless for a few dizzy seconds. Then he looked about him stupidly, ran his hand through his hair, as if to assure himself that he had not been dreaming, and rose to his feet. His knees were trembling oddly under

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him. Automatically, scarcely noticing anything upon which his eyes rested, he made a tour of the room. He glanced out of the window into the bleak, wind-swept street far below ; but he could not have told what he saw. There were jars of flowers on the window ledge, and on the table ; but though he stooped to inhale their fragrance, he did not observe whether they were chrysanthemums or roses. A tiny oil painting on the wall near the piano caught his eye, and he drew near to examine it.

Wetherell knew something about pictures ; and his first glance at this one restored him to his wits, for he recognized that the workmanship was quite exceptional. It was a little idyll, deliciously executed in the spirit of a miniature : — a woodland pool, overhung by dank, gleaming rocks and bosky foliage ; and at one side, in a white light so without warmth that it seemed to have emanated, somehow, from the still heart of the pool itself, a nymph, kneeling, and holding out her hand invitingly to a tiny green enamelled frog that sat on the yellow pad of a lily. The vibrant lustre of the white flesh, the seductiveness of the slender, elf-like physique, the singular luminosity of the hair, which, hanging almost to the water's touch, seemed to have something of the very substance of light in it, possessing no particular colour more than an admixture of all colours —

In the midst of his admiration of these traits, the

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painter's subject suddenly flashed itself upon his perception.

"Well, and how do you like it?" inquired his hostess, who had returned to the room without his knowledge.

Confusion tied his tongue for the moment.

"But it's not at all bad, — *hé?*" she went on, in a perfectly offhand manner, coming to his side. "Poor old Butscha! — you never knew him, of course. He did that. Oh, he was crazy about me. For a year, more than a year, I was his only subject. Always nymphs or dryads, you know, always that white light, — and oh, such original ideas! That was in Paris, you know. Butscha saw me on the street in Copenhagen one day, and followed me for two miles. He told me I must go to Paris with him, or he would shoot himself. Poor old wild darling! Every one said he would have made a tremendous success in a little longer. — It was absinthe, you know."

A sudden wave of tenderness came over her; she turned her back in silence, glided across the room, and took a cigarette from the chased silver box that lay on the tabouret.

"Is n't it terrible," she said, in an altered voice, after a few seconds, "oh, is n't it *ter-r-ible*, my dear, to think that some day we must all die like that, and be put down under the ground where the *worms* are! Oh! I saw them put Butsch down there! I shall never forget it!"

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Turning, Philip saw a shudder pass over her throat and shoulders; and a fleeting horror enlarged the whites of her eyes through the tears that still lingered.

"Oh, if you could only have seen Butschy," she went on, with a dim smile, "you would understand. He was such a love of a man, — so gay, so jolly, so hot-tempered, so artistic, and with hair — my dear man, you have hair just like that! It was the first thing I noticed. Everybody in the Quartier adored Butsch."

She tossed her cigarette into the fire, and watched in silence the vivid yellow flame that licked it up.

A strange embarrassment came over the man. In the silence he became conscious of tameless impulses astir within him, and he was afraid. "I must be going along," he said, in a forced voice.

"Oh," she said. "Must you?"

She raised her face to him with an odd smile that might have been regret or surprise or even pity.

"I'm sorry," said Philip, rising with abrupt resolution.

"Well, here are the articles out of my family wardrobe." She tried to speak gaily; but there was a softness in her voice that belied her. "Come, my frien', see if I am not right about the fit."

Five minutes later he was ready for the street again, brushed, combed, and properly habited. He had not dared look once into the woman's eyes. Now that

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the moment for saying good-by had come, he was almost impotent to utter the words. An immense awkwardness seemed to glue his feet to the ground.

“Well, good-by!” he managed to bring out at last, offering his hand.

She pushed it away from her with a little reproachful gesture. “I believe you have no heart at all,” she said.

She saw the muscles of his cheeks and neck flicker. Her manner changed at once. “I did not mean that,” she said softly. “Listen, — I was going to say something. Let me see. What was it? You have sent it out of my head.”

Almost timidly she put out her hand to his coat collar and flecked away a bit of dust. “Well, listen,” she said, ingratiatingly. “Did you have any engagement for this evening?”

“No,” he replied.

The word came out with fatal, automatic promptness. Something deep within had bidden him peremptorily to say yes; but a whole battery of quickly arrayed instincts had delivered the contrary response before he was aware.

Two bright spots had appeared in her cheeks, and she did not look at him directly as she continued, haltingly: “Well, this is what I was going to say. Listen. Why would n’t you perhaps come up here about eight o’clock, or nine, and we have a little

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supper, say, — just the two of us, you know, like in a studio, — and a nice little good time. Would you not like that, — *hé?*”

Seizing her hand he crushed it to his lips. Without another word, as if seeking refuge from some disaster that threatened, he abruptly quitted the apartment, shutting the door after him with unintentional violence.

The woman gazed an instant, with an inscrutable smile, at the red mark on the back of her hand, then pressed it with a little sob against her cheeks and mouth.

“He will come,” she said to herself, almost aloud. — “He does not want to come; but he will come.”

III

As Wetherell made his way, half-dazed, down the windy avenue and into the Park by one of its northern entrances, the only clear sentiment in his mind was one of deliverance. A spell had been broken. The drug he had been tasting and which had so dizzily mounted to his head appeared to have lost its potency as soon as he found himself out of doors. He filled his lungs with deep draughts of the bracing November air; he scarcely succeeded in repressing an impulse to run and shout.

The insidious witchery of the warm, flower-scented atmosphere, of changeful firelight, of physical nearness, had all but worked its way with him. The thing he had escaped from looked ugly to him now, deformed and loathsome, like the false Duessa, whom the Red Crosse Knight saw at last stripped of her enchantments; and he wondered how he could have come so near succumbing to it.

With hands unconsciously clenched, he breasted a little wooded knoll and seated himself on a secluded bench,—a favourite resort of his, sheltered from the wind and quite cut off from the world of the city, except for a glimpse it gave, through bare branches, of the constant flight of automobiles along a curving

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driveway far below. He felt the necessity of getting his mind in order, of comprehending what he had just been through, and assuring himself of where he stood.

“I can tell her everything. I can tell her everything,” was the thought that declared itself, over and over, in his mind, as clearly as a voice.

Half-automatically he put his hand to his inner waist-coat pocket and drawing thence a small leather folder, opened it, and gazed with devouring intentness upon the photograph it contained. It was of a girl still in the first full radiance of womanly beauty, not older certainly than twenty-two or twenty-three years, and of a proud, candid, high-spirited mien that infallibly betokened race, yes, and not that alone, but the cherished consciousness of it, too. Other generations than hers looked out from those deeply shadowed eyes, and breathed in the sensitive, slightly lifted nostrils; and the evenly arched mouth, with its short, clear-marked upper lip, seemed to have more in it of the will to plan and execute than of the submissive softness commonly considered a grace in woman.

Yet despite the somewhat aggressive pose of the aristocratic young head and the noticeable elevation of the finely modelled chin, there was an expression distinct, yet hard to analyze, of wistfulness; as if the soul behind these outward lineaments could not quite

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conform itself to their demands. Possibly this hint lay in the slight parting of the lips, or perhaps in a certain liquid gentleness of the eyes that seemed to have sought refuge rather than to have made their home by choice under their noble brows: at all events, the spiritual incongruity was there, and served to enhance the loveliness of the face, by affording just that quick human appeal that is so often lacking in the features of high-born maidens.

The minutes passed, and Wetherell still gazed with uninterrupted absorption at the face before him; but his mind was not at all occupied in deciphering the enigma of its beauty.

He was remembering the hour, almost a year ago, now, when he had said good-by to Georgia Raeburn. It was night on the hills of northwestern Connecticut, and the snow lay still unbroken under the cold moonlight. She had come out to the porch with him, a filmy scarf over her abundant dark hair; and for one ineffable moment he had held her in his arms, her lips yielded to his own.

There are moments in every life that time never effaces the perfect memory of,—moments to which all external circumstances seem to contribute their measure of appropriate beauty. Philip saw, as clearly as if it had been yesterday, the gleaming radiance of the snow on the lawn, and of the white rim that every branch and twig lifted into the moonlight. The tall

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colonial columns of the porch, the dark tangle of the bare wistaria, icicle-hung, that festooned their capitals, the long black shadows on the floor,—even the sound of his mare restlessly pawing the snow of the driveway,—it all made a complete and thrilling fact of memory.

With a quivering sigh he had released her at last. “*I can’t say good-by,*” he had whispered. “What am I going to do without you?”

The brave, resolute smile she had returned to him, through eyes that glistened, illumined dark places in his heart. “You will not have to do without me, Philip. I shall be with you all the time.”

He had quickly risen to the height of her own noble spirit. “I know you will,” he had said. “I can share everything with you. I shall have something fine to live for,—to make you proud of me!”

“You are going out into the world to do splendid things,” she said. “You are my knight, Philip; and I sit in my tower, waiting for your return. I can wait a long time, because I know you will come.”

He pressed her hand reverently to his lips.

“Have you decided to tell the Colonel?” he asked, using the appellation for her father that he had used since childhood.

“I rather think I won’t—not yet, Philip,” she had answered softly. “I have the feeling,—I don’t know if I’m right,—that just now he wants me all

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for himself. You understand what I mean? But you know how fond he is of you; — he likes us to be friends."

It had been easy enough for him to apprehend her position. Colonel Raeburn had been a virtual invalid for some years. Of late his invalidism had become almost complete. Georgia was his devoted nurse, his inseparable companion. She adored her father. She had willingly sacrificed the last years of a college course to be with him. His minute exactions upon her strength and affection, which would sometimes have seemed tyrannical to any heart less generously dedicated than hers, were always gladly responded to. She was proud to know herself necessary to him. There was no rebellion in her soul against the isolation of her lot; nor was it indeed in any desire for freedom nor in hunger for a new and different love that she had given her promise to Philip Wetherell.

They had always been friends. For some years she had felt herself to be singled out in a peculiar sense by his heart. And she knew that she loved him. His fineness and generosity of spirit, his courage, his talents, and the glowing intensity of his affection were all very precious to her. She loved him most for the qualities in which he most resembled the one object of her adoration. Philip knew that her father held first place in her heart, and he was too generous to be jealous or to claim more for himself — now. Be-

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sides he had no right, he believed, to ask for more. His career was all ahead of him; he was only at the beginning. He had nothing to offer her but hope and dreams; and it made him proud that she was willing to share these with him.

Consequently when she had told him of her decision to say nothing to her father, he had immediately acquiesced. "You know better than I what is best," he said. "Everything will be between ourselves as long as you wish."

Their talk had been interrupted by the tinkle of a bell from within the house.

"I must go," she whispered, and turned her face quickly to him for the parting kiss. "Good-by, Philip."

An instant later he had leaped to Griselda's back, and was tearing away through the powdery snow, which broke into a cloud under her flying hoofs.

The months that followed had seen the completion, with high honours, of his graduate course at the Polytechnic; a brief, memorable pilgrimage to the chief architectural shrines of France and Italy; and his establishment, now six weeks old, in the draughting-room of a downtown firm, where flattering prospects partly compensated for a meagre salary. Shortly before his return from the other side, Georgia had accompanied her father to a sanatorium of the middle west, in the hope that the change of air and routine

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might bring some benefit to his valvular trouble; and lately the news that had come to Philip had been most gratifying.

He was better, yes, it did really seem so, than for many months. He could walk about with comparative ease; he could see people without being exhausted by it; his appetite was improving; he was sleeping well; his spirits were less clouded, — he laughed often, and seemed happy to talk of old times. They were even making plans to return to Highstone for the winter. Philip would be coming home perhaps — could n't he manage it? — for the holiday and weekend. There would be long rides together over their favourite roads, and a tramp to the top of dear old Yelping Hill, where the witch-hazel would be sure to be in blossom.

Philip had not delayed to assure her that he could manage it. By putting in several evenings at the office, he had already guaranteed himself the extra day and a half. For the past fortnight the thought of the return to the hills and of seeing Georgia again had become a preoccupation with him, filling every moment of leisure, and often intruding unbidden upon his working hours. He was hungry for her. He trembled at the idea of holding her in his arms once more, and of feeling her cheek close to his own. The intimacy and freedom of talk they would have was most delightful to him in anticipation, — the mere being again

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with some one who cared for him, who shared his ideals and ambitions.

Still new to the life of the metropolis, he had not yet recovered from the cruel loneliness that a sensitive nature always experiences in the presence of countless thousands of fellow-beings utterly unknown to it. Never a face out of all those multitudes that he recognized! He was quick to sense the vast, multiplex, entralling life of the total organism; but still he was outside it all. He did not yet belong. He had not formed any intimate ties. His shyness stood in his way, and an instinctive fastidiousness which demanded a something in friendship that none of his new acquaintances seemed ready to afford.

Loyal moreover to the principles of his New England upbringing, he had not yielded to any of the city's facile seductions, despite a temperament whose ardour was almost meridional, and a craving for pleasure that corresponded in its intensity to the freedom and masculine vigour of his imagination. But this loyalty had been maintained only at the price of severe and costly struggles, — the more severe and the more costly from the fact that they must always be most resolutely persevered in when discouragement, or loneliness, or fatigue was heaviest upon his soul.

Then it was that the impulses to let go, to drink deeply of the cup of indulgence, had been most imperative; and there were more than a few nights al-

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ready in the tale of these six weeks when he had bound himself remorselessly to the perusal of the pages of a technical treatise, not daring to let his mind out of its leash for an instant ; or had paced up and down West Street with clenched hands, timing the journey to the Battery and back. On such occasions the thought of Georgia and his hope of seeing her before many weeks and the pride he had that he could tell her everything without shame or apology were his greatest moral reinforcements. It was just these, indeed, that had plucked him to-day, a craft already caught in a maelstrom, from the most vertiginous temptation of his life.

He realized it with a new keenness now as, having replaced the leather case, he continued to sit there on the Park bench and began a mental review of the scenes through which he had so lately passed, — the street accident, the drive in the coupé with its first alluring intimations, then the cosy, familiar, audacious tête-à-tête by the fire, — a whole procession of memories flashed before him with a faint, dangerous revival of the warmth and colour of the original scenes themselves ; and he found himself looking once more at the small, elfin face of Katrinka, with its white skin, golden-grey eyes, and strange, light-filled hair ; saw the flickering of each changeful mood across the mobile lips ; heard the odd music of her voice, with its delicious "*he's*" and "*my dear's*" ; felt the whole

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captivating abandon of her demeanour, the idolatry of her regard, and the delirious, siren-like spell of her invitation.

Philip picked up the hat, which he had laid beside him on the seat, and looked at it intently. He wondered why he had consented to accept it, in view of the thing it clearly implied: that he would return. He could not quite have recognized it at the moment. Yes, he had recognized it; he had known perfectly well what he was doing; the fact was, he had not had the will to refuse. There had been something automatic, trance-like, about the whole operation. Yet at no time had he really intended to go back.

Fortunately there were other means of returning the articles than carrying them in person. He wondered whether she would be surprised that night when he did not come. He had given no promise. On the contrary, though he had said nothing, his fantastic exit would certainly have indicated a clear refusal.

And it suddenly came over him that it must have seemed very absurd to her—that vehement outbreak of Puritanical virtue in him, the sincerity of which was practically belied by his demonstrative farewell. No doubt she had enjoyed a good laugh over it after he had disappeared, or perhaps pondered, with that sphinx-like smile of hers, on the weakness of a certain type of man that desired what other men desired, yet lacked the courage to enact the desire. What else

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indeed could scruples mean to her than mere conventionality and cowardice?

A shiver passed over him as he suddenly became aware of the insidious quality of the reverie upon which his emotions had launched him. He must shake it off. He felt in his pocket for his pipe, intending to fill it and continue his walk southward through the Park; but as he did so, his hand encountered an envelope; and with a start he remembered that it was a letter from Georgia Raeburn. The postman had handed it to him just as he was quitting his lodgings that afternoon, and he had saved it to read at leisure in this very spot.

He drew it out, studied the superscription for a moment, opened it with his penknife, inhaled the delicate perfume of the faintly tinted pages, and began to read. . . .

Five minutes later he still sat there, as in a stupor, his eyes fixed absently before him, regarding nothing, the letter held listlessly on one knee.

Well, they were not coming home, after all.

The Colonel was worse. The doctors advised them to spend the winter in one of the cottages near the sanatorium. They would probably do so. She wondered whether he would still plan to go up to the country for Thanksgiving. She would be thinking of him. . . .

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Thinking of him. . . . *Thinking* of him! . . .
Much good that would do! . . .

A bitter, choking resentment surged up in him against the fate that held her away, just at the time when most of all he needed her, when most he had counted upon her to save him. The mockery of it! What use was there in keeping up the thankless, hateful struggle any longer, when this was the reward!

He had never felt so wretchedly lonely before. He saw the winter stretching ahead, dull, grinding, monotonous, utterly barren. He was young; he was full of life; his whole being ached for pleasure. It came blindly over him that he had a right to it. What would it signify in the end whether he had slaked his thirst now and again at forbidden fountains? Katrinka had invited him to come back. She would be waiting. . . .

The trees were dancing before his vision. With a sudden horror of the step made so easy for him and which he seemed to feel he was destined to take, sooner or later, whether he would or no — Why not sooner, since things had turned out this way? — why not? — why not? — He sprang to his feet, and set off at a determined pace across the Park.

He told himself that he was going to fight off the temptation; that nothing in heaven or earth would make him yield to it.

IV

IN the kitchen of the old brick house on Mullin Street, where Philip Wetherell had lodgings, matters had come to a very bad pass, indeed. Victorine stood, immensely agitated, before her glowing range, the ruddy gleams from which, as she thrust her poker vindictively through the bars of the grate, served to heighten the already high colour of her broad features.

“Ah, and is it not always like that nowadays!” she declared. “I tell you he cannot be trusted any longer to do one little errand.”

There was a sigh, slight as a breath of wind through a key-hole, from a corner of the room where the low-burning gas-jet failed to penetrate clearly.

“And what am I to do now, will you tell me?” went on Victorine, putting down the poker noisily, and turning with arms defiantly akimbo toward her invisible auditor. “What will become of the dinner? Does he want to ruin it, — the papa Victor? What will one do with a fish when he is cooked already and must wait, wait, *wait* for his sauce? No mustard, no sauce; no sauce, no fish!” She spread her capable arms with a gesture of tragic finality. “And Jenny is having guests to-night!”

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A thin, cricket-like voice came with feeble protest out of the obscurity.

“Patience, a little patience, my Victorine. The papa is old; you must remember he cannot march like one time. Perhaps he need a little rest some place.”

Victorine gave a skeptical hunch to her stocky shoulders. “Some place!” she grunted. “Yes, always some place! It is not enough to sit all day by the fire; but when he go for a little box mustard he must stop some place for a rest. Say, do I ever deny him his little glass cognac when he come home tired? Was ever a daughter more devoted than me? No. Yet always he will be stopping at that *some place*. — Well, the fish will be ruined.”

There was high tragedy in the set of her heavy brow.

“It is not your fault, petite,” came the cricket-voice, soothingly. “We must be patient with these men. Life is full of troubles.”

A step was heard outside the basement grill.

“Ah, there he comes!” cried Victorine. Her face cleared; then fell again. “No, it is not the papa’s step. Who then?”

She listened anxiously.

A familiar voice called her. “May I come in, mademoiselle?”

“Oh, it is Monsieur Philippe,” she exclaimed. — “Yes, monsieur. The gate is not latched. Come in.”

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She hastily mopped her face with her apron, gave a straightening touch to her small knob of hair, and turned up the gas-jet. The gate squeaked and slammed to, and an instant later Wetherell entered the kitchen. The colour in his cheeks was high.

“Good-evening, mademoiselle. — Good-evening, madame.” He turned to the corner where a tiny, white-coiffed old woman was discovered, deep in the recesses of a padded arm-chair. “How is the old maman to-night? And where is the papa Victor?”

He had the manner of being quite at home in this savoury-smelling apartment.

“Oh, for him!” replied Victorine, with scornful lightness, “he is taking his little glass some place. All a half-hour ago he went to the corner for some mustard. He does not care if the dinner is ruined.”

“It does n’t smell ruined,” observed Philip, seating himself in the papa’s chair at one side of the range. “It smells like a culinary masterpiece. Some day you will be worshipped as goddess of the cuisine, mademoiselle.”

One would have said that the contriver of this compliment must have some object in view. He had, indeed, the look of wanting to say something more, if only the opening would offer itself.

But Victorine’s temper was not greatly mollified. “Oh, it would not be too bad, I dare say, if it must not wait, wait till the end of the world. It is a dis-

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grace, the way he has deserted me, and him a cook too, by profession, and the inventor of the famous Sauce of the Café Antoine!"

"Come," proposed Philip, in a voice that was intended to be bold, but seemed all the more shy on that account; "I will make a bargain with you, mademoiselle. I will go for the mustard myself. I will find the papa and bring him home. Everything will be saved."

Victorine clasped her stout hands.

"Oh, monsieur! You are *too* obliging. Oh, I could never have the heart to permit you! I would go myself, you understand, only I dare not leave my kitchen at this moment. The dinner requires to be looked after incessantly."

"Ah, but this is a bargain I am proposing," he protested with a laugh of some embarrassment. "I am not generous. I demand my pay. Do you agree?"

She gave him a look in which a consuming desire for a box of mustard struggled with a sudden misgiving.

"Surely, monsieur, it's not another of those sick dogs!"

Philip opened his coat with a half-defiant, half-apologetic smile, and bent his head solicitously over a small bundle of grey fur.

"It is! It is!" ejaculated Victorine, despairingly. "No, mademoiselle, it is not. See!" — he drew

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it out tenderly. "It's only a little cat. — A poor, harmless little innocent of a cat!"

"A cat! Oh, my God, what a horror!" she cried, throwing up defensive hands. "But it is impossible, monsieur. You promised me — have you forgotten then? — that a dog and a pigeon would be all. And now we must have a cat! Never! *Nev-vair!*"

He gave her a look of urgent supplication. "I know it's not very clean," he admitted, in the most ingratiating of voices. "I would n't have brought it, honestly, only one leg seems to have been broken somehow, and I thought I ought not to miss this chance to see if I could splint it successfully. There were some boys throwing pieces of brick at it."

"The world is too full of cats," asseverated Victorine, crisply. She tested a boiling potato with a long fork; then clapped the cover noisily on the pot.

He gave her a reproachful look which the steam absorbed before it reached her. "See, mademoiselle, when it is washed up, and has a nice white ribbon round its neck, it will not look so bad. It will be quite pretty, in a way, quite chic. You would n't mind very much, surely, would you?"

There was a sharp ring at the upstairs door-bell.

"Those are Jenny's guests," gasped the woman. "No mustard! No mustard!" She wrung her hands dramatically.

"I am going for it," said Philip, seizing his advan-

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tage. "See, I will leave the kitten in the papa Victor's chair. What shop do you get it at?"

"The little delicatessen, monsieur, just around the corner. Oh, you are kind! — And if you see the old papa some place, tell him he has perfectly ruined the fish!"

The young man, stooping over his little foundling, gave it a monitory pat or two, to impress it with the need of good behaviour. "I'll be back in three minutes," he promised, and made a hasty exit from the kitchen.

Victorine busied herself noisily at the stove. "What a man! What a man!" she exclaimed, disgust and admiration vying in her tone. "Can any one say what he will bring into this house next? — A monkey, I would n't be surprise'!"

"Torine, ma fille, you are too impatient," chirped the old woman, who till now had taken no part in the argument. "You must expect a little trouble in this world. No one pretends that life is easy for us women."

Victorine did not think it necessary either to agree or to disagree with this favourite sentiment of the maman Susanne's, but continued her monologue, as she stirred the potage, tasted it, and added an extra shake of cayenne.

"First a pigeon with a torn wing; then a dog with one ear bitten off in a fight — oh, such a dog! a

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veritable disgrace, in God's name!—and now”—she turned accusingly on the newcomer, and her voice rose to a desperate pitch — “*you!*”

The kitten was busily licking its injured member, and only paused to give her a look of grave inquiry. Victorine bent a little closer to examine its appearance, her nose knotted with disgust.

“You are im-pos-seeble!” she announced, finally, with three Rhadamanthine shakes of the head, each more terrible than the last.

“Monsieur Philippe is a very nice young man,—très gentil,” put in the tiny voice, faintly.

“Oh, I do not say he is too bad,” consented the younger woman, guardedly. “He has not the abominable habits of some young men. He never has a dozen companions in his room at night to sing and get drunk and smash the furniture like that monster who had the mansarde last summer. He always brings his rent every two weeks.”

“Ah, but that is something, Torine,” observed Mother Susanne, deeply, “in a world like ours, where so many never pay rent at all. Yes, my Torine, that is something in this world.”

There was a rattle at the gate-latch, and the sound of voices.

“The mustard!” ejaculated Victorine, making ambling speed out of the room.

“The papa!” piped the shrivelled little creature in

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the white Norman coiffe, pressing her gnarled hands together.

Philip reentered the kitchen before the others, gathered up his new charge with eager tenderness, and waited for the verdict.

Mademoiselle followed closely. "Yes, it is the right species," she declared. "The dinner may be rescued yet." Already she had pried open the yellow box and was measuring out the precious powder. "You are very kind, monsieur."

"And the cat may stay?"

Victorine was strangely absorbed in her culinary duties, and vouchsafed no answer. Philip finally repeated his question.

"And the cat may stay, mademoiselle?"

She did not look at him. "One night, monsieur." The words seemed to have been forcefully jerked out of her. "Put a little box in the rear basement. That is our hospital nowadays."

Taking advantage of the entrance at this moment of the papa Victor, Philip hastily left the kitchen, and made his way to the extension basement. As he opened the door, One-Ear bounded to meet him with a yelp of impish pleasure. No, you could not much blame Victorine La Bergère for not being drawn to her lodger's pets. One-Ear was a rakehell cur. Worse than that, he took a shameless satisfaction in being one. A runaway kinetoscope could not have

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attributed him with a greater number of grotesque poses per minute than he was capable of assuming, by the aid of his squat legs, impudent, bristly tail, long neck, and solitary auricular appendage.

But to-night, instead of the customary romp, for which he was ready, he heard himself peremptorily ordered to his box, and with tail suddenly limp, rendered obedience. Philip did not wish to be interrupted in the surgical attentions which he was about to administer to the kitten's leg. He whittled some splints; he brought hot water, soap, and rags, and for the next hour was completely absorbed in his undertaking, quite forgetting that he had had no dinner, forgetting indeed for the time being that the world offered any more serious problem than that of securing night's lodgings for abandoned cats from recalcitrant landladies.

With Mademoiselle Victorine, as may readily be inferred, his difficulties had already been pronounced, though by the employment of assiduous tact, flattery, bribery, and persuasiveness, he had so far won her consent to his projects.

“But, monsieur,” she had said to him one day, with a supercilious gesture, “but, monsieur, you have the heart of a young girl. It is an absurdity!”

Philip had flushed to the roots of his hair.

“Not at all,” he had replied, defiantly. “You do not understand, mademoiselle. My interest in these

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things is scientific. I watch the healing of wounds, the knitting of broken bones, with the most profound attention. What reason should I have, pray, for wanting to keep a dirty little beast around, if it were not that each case presents some new problem?"

Victorine grunted skeptically. "You are a scientist?" she asked, with a masterful innuendo.

"Not by profession," replied Philip. "But science has always been one of my greatest interests."

"In that case," said Mademoiselle La Bergère, "you should be dear, dear friends with that tall, silent Monsieur Barry who has the room next to you. Every night he is at work, sometimes till one o'clock, over his microscope. You must tell *him* about your science."

Victorine could be magnificent, when the mood was on her. Philip shuddered at the approach of the day, certainly not far ahead, when all his arts would not avail to extract another favour from her crisply shut lips. He resolved, indeed, that he would save himself from the mortification of a refusal. This would be his last folly.

After the new charge had been fed with warm milk and put to bed in a small carpeted box next to the furnace, Philip stopped to have a little talk with One-Ear, who cocked his evil head on one side like a battered gargoyle and raised such a bedlam of barks that he had to be sent back into retirement for fear of

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disturbing the household. Then he shut the door of the rear basement and ran up to his room.

Before he had reached the top of the second flight, he remembered the problem that had been sleeping in the back of his mind for almost two hours. In the interval it seemed only to have gained a fiery intensity of life. It was not to be put out of his head by merely declaring that it had been already decided. It had not been decided, nor would it be so long as alternative lines of action were open to him. What was he going to do?

At this moment he found it possible to say to himself that he was going to stay quietly at home with a book. It came to him that it would be pleasant to run downstairs every hour or so to have a look at Cassée, — he had chosen the name because of the broken leg, — and something warm and tender that had stirred at his heart had appeased, to a certain extent, the loneliness and hunger that had preyed upon him that afternoon. He would read for a while; and then he would write a letter to Georgia, telling her as many amusing things as he could. — Why had n't she been sorrier, he wondered, at giving up the home trip? Probably because she was so absorbed in her father's troubles that she had not had much time to think about the other thing. Yet it seemed as if she might have said a little more, if only for his sake, for she must have known that to him,

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at least, it would be a terrible disappointment. — But perhaps she had not thought of *that*, either.

Arrived in his snug little mansarde, he lighted his green-shaded lamp, stirred up the fire in the Franklin stove, donned bath-robe and slippers, and proceeded to assemble from closet and chiffonier the essentials of a very simple repast. He told himself that he was not going to take the trouble to go out to a restaurant to-night.

That is what he told himself. In reality he was obeying a precautionary instinct. Without acknowledging it to himself, he had a vivid sense of the instability of his present mood, and he wanted to guard it in every way he could. For deepest of all his desires — and he knew it — was the desire to be loyal to the best that was in him. So slight a thing as the thought of the little sick cat in the box by the furnace, if he could only hold it in his mind, might be enough to carry him through the ordeal of these next two hours.

But he by no means said all this to himself. He did not pose in his own eyes as a St. Anthony. He did not look for melodramatic elements in the situation. He was as healthy-minded as most healthy young men; not in the least given to prying into the recesses of his own mind. But he knew that there was a seething flood of dangerous desire within him, and that it might boil up at any moment and over-

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whelm him. Instinctively he grasped at whatever seemed to promise security.

Having finished his meagre supper, he took up a treatise on Reinforced Concrete Construction, found his place in it, and set himself earnestly to read.

The attempt was a failure. For a few minutes, while he forced his attention resolutely on the scent, he could follow the author's exposition; then insensibly, without being aware of the relaxing process, he would be merely reading the words with his eye, grasping nothing of the ideas behind them. When he recognized what had occurred, he would consciously go back to the point of wandering and begin afresh. But it was no use. He grew more and more out of patience with himself, and at last, with an exclamation of disgust, flung the book across the room at a pile of couch-cushions.

Next he drew out a sheet of writing paper, and with great precision penned the date; then sat impotently before the white sheet for ten minutes, without an idea in his head, biting the end of his pen. At last he tore the thing angrily to pieces; threw off his lounging robe, and got out his drawing-board, upon which he had a partly traced elevation of the design he meant to enter in the Terra Cotta Competition. At least, he said to himself, he could ink. That did not require thought: merely mechanical dexterity and patience.

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For twenty minutes he worked furiously and without a moment's relaxation, his lips pressed white together, his feet drumming nervously on the floor. He heard a clock downstairs buzzing for the hour, and counted the strokes as they tinkled briskly into the silence. Eight.

Eight! He dropped his pen and stared blankly at the opposite wall.

Just now she was beginning to expect him. He could see the glittering, luxurious apartment, fragrant, inviting abandon; and her, the elusive, bewildering, irresistible spirit of it, sitting in the deep chair by the hearth, her little feet drawn up under her, her dream-like hair ruddy in the glow of the fire. . . .

He set his teeth into his lips till they hurt, and bent more fiercely than ever over his drawing-board. He felt himself slipping, slipping, — as if an invisible, relentless net had fallen about him, and were drawing him off his feet. Was this the end of the struggle? he asked himself. Was this the final subjugation of the spirit in him? His brain seemed to be growing numb.

A knock at the door startled him almost out of his chair, and he had only time to recover a semblance of composure, before his gaunt fellow-lodger, John Barry, entered the room.

V

ALTHOUGH for six weeks the two men had occupied adjoining rooms, this was the first time they had interchanged more than a perfunctory word of greeting on the stairs or at the door. There was something in the mien of the older man that discouraged advances,—a certain defiance, if not contemptuousness, in the carriage of the head, the slight dilation of the nostril, and the habitual curl of the thin lip under its sparse, discoloured beard.

“Won’t you have a chair?” asked Philip, somewhat at a loss for his visitor’s business.

“Thank you,” replied Barry, with a negative gesture of his lean, long-fingered hand. “I came in only to inquire whether you possessed such a commodity as a bottle of India Ink. My own seems to have run dry.—Ah, but I see you are doing some drawing, yourself.” He made a movement to go. “I trust you will pardon my interruption.”

There was precision about the man’s language that contrasted oddly with his negligent, threadbare clothes, soiled collar, and unkempt hair and beard.

“Hold on,” cried Philip. “I’m only fiddling. I don’t care when I do this. I wish you’d take the ink.”

“You call that fiddling, eh?” asked the other, ap-

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proaching the desk with interest. "It looks very much like work to me, — workmanly work, too," he added, taking a puff at his black stogie, "if I may presume to an opinion without knowing anything of the subject." He surveyed the elevation intently. "Is it a practical design?"

"No," answered Philip, more gratified than he could account for by the man's appreciation. "At least not specifically so. Expense is not a factor in the problem. The aim is merely to illustrate the architectural possibilities of terra cotta. My idea is to confine colour and ornament to the apertures, the frieze, and the cornice — you see? — here, and here. The larger surfaces are left entirely plain."

Following the lead of an intelligent question or two, he embarked upon an absorbed discussion of the design. Before he had done, he had brought out the whole series of tracings and explained them with fevered volubility and enthusiasm. It was not customary for him to talk like this. He wondered at it himself as he heard the words come and recognized in his voice an odd dry heightening of its usual pitch.

"No, a considerable number of the features are deliberate adaptations," he proffered, in answer to a question of his guest's. "For example, that treatment of the window cornice, — see, it's virtually the same motif as in this Municipal Palace of Perugia."

He opened a sketch-book that lay on the table, and

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exhibited a pencil study of the decoration in question. The record had evidently been made rather hastily; but there was a sure intellectual tact in the rendering that could not be mistaken. Equally characteristic of the artist's temper was the running accompaniment of thumb-nail sketches, *remarques*, that filled in every corner of his book, — here a woman with a jar of water on her shoulders, the vigorous movement of her limbs revealed with almost uncanny dexterity by a few drapery lines; there a young girl with a large, flat basket of flowers; again an old man, double-bent over a heavy stick and accompanied by a droop-tail dog; crowded into a lower corner, a scrawny goat drinking out of a richly sculptured fountain.

"You have a rare talent for all that," said Barry, with the first smile Philip had ever seen on his haughty face.

The young man was too thoroughly the artist to have recourse to any false modesty.

"Yes," he admitted, frankly. "I have. And I take an uncommon amount of pleasure in it."

"But you like your architecture better?" said Barry.

The dark eyes of his companion glowed with enthusiasm. "It's the biggest, superbest thing in the world!" he declared. "But it tests a man out relentlessly. I have n't yet proved myself. All I have so far is my ambition."

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The older man turned a penetrating scrutiny upon him, but made no comment.

"I must not impose further on your patience," he broke off. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll fetch my ink bottle and half fill it from yours, if that's agreeable to you."

He left the room for a moment. Philip caught out his watch and stared at it. Only twenty minutes after eight! He thought he had been talking an hour. There was a seething tumult through his whole being that made utterly impossible the thought of further work that night. What was he going to do? What was he going to do?

"I had a few little histological diagrams I was anxious to get completed," explained Barry, re-entering. "This is a genuine accommodation on your part."

Philip took the bottle from him; but in filling it from his own his hand shook so violently that some of the ink was spilled.

"That's abominable!" he exclaimed, in dismay. "I'm downright mortified."

Barry fastened steady, deep-seeing eyes upon his face. "I observe," he remarked, quietly, "that you are a very tired and distraught young man."

"I don't know what's the matter with me," said Philip, stupidly.

"You can't burn the candle at both ends," com-

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mented Barry, wiping the bottle on the lining of his ragged coat. "A young man like you needs relaxation. Take my word for it, you won't achieve that ambition of yours any the quicker for trying to achieve it too quick."

"You may be right," consented his auditor. "I had the feeling that I ought to stick to it to-night."

"Ought! Ought!" echoed the older man with a harsh laugh. "Where did you learn that word, pray? Are you from New England?"

"Yes; all my ancestry is New England," rejoined Philip. "I'm proud of it."

"Be as proud of it as you like, young man; but don't let your precious inheritance of oughts be the wreck of you. Did n't you say just now that your ambition was the biggest thing in your life?"

His listener nodded, dully.

"Well, then, there's conscience enough for you. Don't worship a fetich. Do you keep your old New England religion?"

"No, not most of it."

"You've freed yourself from the letter of it: that's all. The chains of its hell-fire code are still on you. They hamper you all the time. You have n't the courage to live up to your ambition and to let that become your morality. Did you ever make excursions into natural science?"

"Very little into the philosophy of the thing."

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“It might have been a good antidote for some of these moral superstitions.”

The man’s voice had an almost wounding caus-ticity. “Go to Nature for your moral code, and she’ll offer you one that has its foundations on rock-bottom facts. It may not be dainty or poetic. — Shocking, perhaps, to the delicate sensibilities of the moral sentimentalists. But sound; verifiable; and if your eyes are opened you can read it authoritatively in all the operations of human society to-day, despite the pretty masks and disguises that philosophies and religions have drawn over it. Leave philosophies and religions to the ignorant, the weak, and the timid. Concede them their world of illusions.”

Barry was speaking with the fervour of a prophet, his proud head thrown back, a sneer of bitterness and disenchantment on his sensitive lips. Philip had not in the least been prepared for such an outbreak. He was in no condition to criticize the man’s declaration of unfaith, or to take issue with it. He could not think. He felt himself swept along on the wave.

“Nature blessed me with a very particular, unusual, and precious birthright,” declared Barry, with a jarring, metallic laugh. “And in return, I take every opportunity that comes to me to preach her gospel. — One law, one gospel, namely, and to wit: *Get!* operative in plant, animal, anthropoid, and homo sapiens.”

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He brought his two hands together with an abrupt gesture of finality; then, with a shrug of the shoulders that might have been a shudder, fastened upon his physiognomy its habitual mask of restraint and hauteur.

“My harangue is done for this time,” he said. “Once I get launched it’s not easy to stop me.”

Philip had sunk into a chair, overcome by a strange weakness. There was not a ghost of protest in him. The cynical dogma he had just listened to was terrifyingly welcome at this moment; all the wild desires of his nature, struggling in their leash, shouted and danced as they felt the hand that had checked them slowly, certainly relaxing its control.

“Don’t work any more to-night,” directed Barry, sternly, as he quitted the room. “Your New England conscience has been doing its best to strangle you. Take it in hand while there is yet time. And if you ever want any more of the New Law and Prophets, come to me. — Good-night.”

Philip continued sitting in his chair after his guest had departed, staring dully at the closed door. Something had happened. He was free, — free. The tormenting struggle within him had subsided. He was only dimly conscious that time was passing. A delicious, drug-like lassitude rippled and flowed over his senses.

Finally, with a start, recollecting himself, he drew

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out his watch again. Eight-forty! He would be late. But what of that?

Springing to his feet, he hastily slipped off his business clothes and proceeded to don a scrupulous evening costume. At three minutes to nine he stood before the glass, administering the final judicial touches to tie and hair. Then he threw on his muffler and surtout, set his opera hat over his crisp, black locks, and took his gloves. He was ready. He turned down the light automatically, opened the door, and had reached the head of the stairs, before a sudden, arresting afterthought struck him.

He retraced his steps hurriedly; reached up his hand to the key of the chandelier; hesitated a second; shivered; extinguished the light; and once more left the room.

VI

BECAUSE she had noticed that he loved flowers, she had filled the room with luxuriant ferns and jars of rare chrysanthemums and orchids until, under the dim illumination of its opal-shaded lamp, it resembled some exotic grotto, touched into enchantment by the fitful, ruddy flashes of the fire. She had not doubted his coming. It had never occurred to her that her invitation might be rejected.

She was accustomed to be desired. It was the atmosphere in which she had always lived. She was accustomed to be sought after, to be sued by every device known to the men who trade in love: flattery, gold, adoration, jewels, threats. She had seen men's faces distorted and wolfish with the hunger of love. And now, for the first time in her life, she was waiting for a lover who did not come.

When the Sèvres clock on the mantelpiece uttered its soft, unobtrusive note of the half-hour, the sound brought dismay into her heart.

“Susan,” she called.

The domestic appeared at the door.

“Please telephone to the Central, like a good girl, and ask for the exact time.” Her voice had the leaden inexpressiveness of great fatigue.

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Nervously rising to her feet, she switched on a sunburst of ceiling lights, crossed the room, and surveyed herself critically in the handsome pier-glass that was placed between the windows. In the diffuse brilliance of the artificial light, a very different loveliness lay upon her from that of the November afternoon, yet one equally strange and indicable. The low-cut gown of filmy frost-green revealed a neck and shoulders of alabaster whiteness and whose perfection of contour was enhanced by the single medallion of limpid beryl that hung from a thread-like chain and half concealed, half emphasized the delicious hollow in which it rested. The exquisite outlines of the lips had been more clearly defined by a touch of carmine; but her cheeks still retained their transparent, lustrous pallor. She had drawn down her hair smoothly over her ears, and fastened it in a low knot at the nape of the neck; and about it she had bound, for sole ornament, a narrow ribbon of green velvet.

With leisurely, dispassionate attention she passed every detail of her toilette in review. She was satisfied.

“If he could only see me now!” she said to herself; and a wave of longing enveloped her that made the tears start. She bent intently toward the mirror, until her face almost touched the reflection of itself.

“You are beautiful, my dear. You are beautiful, *beautiful!*” she declared, half defiantly. “Oh, he must come!”

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She remembered again how he had left her; and with that memory she tried to regain her assurance. It was only some delay! It could not be that he would not soon arrive!

Susan reentered the room. "It is twenty-five minutes to ten, madam," she announced.

"Ah, then the clock is right," answered Katrinka, mechanically, while her hope faded. "I do not know that we shall need the supper. Probably not."

"Shall I put away the things then?"

"No. Don't put away the things. Not quite yet. Wait just a few minutes more. There may have been some mistake. — *Oh!*"

There came an impetuous ring of the bell.

"Let him in, Susan."

A sudden weakness sent her to the mantelpiece for support. She leant upon it heavily with one elbow, and put her hand with a quick gesture of suffocation to her throat.

The next instant Wetherell entered the room. His face was set and bloodless; but his eyes burned.

"Oh —" was all she could gasp. — "You came!"

He darted forward, speechless, and caught her in his arms, while his lips buried themselves in her hair. For an instant she abandoned herself to his embrace; then she liberated herself, and stood back.

"Oh, — stop!" she cried, faintly.

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With damp hands clenched, he dropped into a deep chair before the fire.

There was a silence of some duration, while each strove to regain a measure of composure. Katrinka was experiencing what was, perhaps, the first real shyness of her life. She realized that she had triumphed; but a flash of insight had been vouchsafed her into a tragedy that appalled her spirit. She was vaguely aware that the moment just passed stood for an epoch in the life of the man she had so lightly enticed thither, — a crucial capitulation. Forces quite beyond her comprehension had battled with her for the mastery. There had been not only a victory, but a defeat also.

In the firelight she saw the beads of moisture gleam redly on his forehead, while he sat there staring, immovably, into the blaze. The silence became intolerable. It echoed and beat through the room, drowning the tick of the clock.

At last she murmured, “I was angry at you for not coming; but now, — oh, my dear, I am almost sorry you came.”

Her utterance had the timid simplicity of a child. There was nothing left in her of the coquette; no archness; no double meanings; only the frightened tenderness of utter adoration.

“Sorry! — Why?” The man brought out the words with an effort, not turning his head.

“Because, — Oh, I did n’t understand, my dear.

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I don't now. Only, some way, I know that you're *different*. You're too good for me."

He was on his knees beside her, pressing her cold hands to his temples. "Too good for you!" he groaned. "Have n't I sold my soul for you? Have n't I done it of my own free will, knowingly, deliberately? What is there left of me now that's too good for you? — I'll sell that too!"

She passed her fingers gently through his raven-black hair. "Come, we are going to be sensible, my dear," she said, very softly. "You will go back home. You are not going to stay any longer. We will forget each other."

The man raised his face to her with an agonizing inquiry. "Do you mean that?" he asked, through lips that only half shaped the words.

The woman shuddered. "No," she answered faintly.

She put back his hair from his damp brow, and kissed it very lightly; then made a movement to rise.

"There," she said, gently. "Now you know everything. — Listen. We are going to have a little supper. Promise me you will behave very, very proper, like my good little boy — *he*? You will not make me reproach you once."

She went to the door. "Susan, we will have supper at ten o'clock." She turned to Philip with a bright

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smile. "And now," she said, "you must admire my flowers. I get them all for you. — Listen, my dear, I shall call you Lippo, because I am sure you were bore in Naples."

"If I was born in Naples, you were born in some lovely cave, deep, deep, under the sea. To-night you make me think of a wave crowned with foam far out from shore. — Or else you came into being in the heart of a magic forest, where a little sunlight filters down only at mid-day, the trees are so tall."

"Ah, that is pretty," she cried. "I am glad you like the woods. I was in the Black Forest once. Oh, it was superb. And again, one time, I was in the Forest of Fontainebleau. It was not so magnificent, no, but oh, my dear, if you could see Barbizon, — even to-day, when the great artists are gone! And oh, my Lippo, such a cunning little restaurant out under the trees at the end of the village, in a sort of grove. Shall I ever forget it? Such venison patties as I had there will never be again, I swear to you."

Philip had been at Barbizon, too, traversing the forest on his wheel; but he did not recall the restaurant.

"No? How funny!" she exclaimed. "A big grey stone wall, don't you remember it? and such a pretty gate, with vines that hung down — so! — and little pink blossoms like tiny insects with wings. And oh, my dear, the moon at Barbizon! Do you remember?

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They never have a moon like that anywhere else in the world, almost as bright as the day, and so calm, so still, like a dream. I do not wonder those artists fell in love with Barbizon, do you? Poor old Millet, with all his children, — how many of them? Nine? What an absurdity, *h&e*, for an artist, who should be free like a bird. — And never a sou to support them with!"

Katrinka had succeeded in regaining much of her customary vivacity. But she was far from being the woman of the afternoon. The manner of the siren had been laid by and forgotten as soon as the lure of the siren had done its work. More than that, something in the intensity and abandon of the man's adoration had wrought a change in her attitude toward him, which had become timid, veiled, girlish, even, as if the sophistication of all her earlier experiences in love had quite evaporated, and she were knowing for the first time its thrill and wonder.

They examined the flowers together with unaffected delight; and she made him shift the jars about from one position to another, to try the effects of different lights and combinations. She made him admire her new player-piano, and gave him a very creditable performance of two of Moszkowski's Spanish Dances. Then she began a roll of Oberon selections; but broke off suddenly, and half turned her face to him, with a pensive, far-away expression that he had not seen before.

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“I had a little sylvan dance I used to do to that, oh, long ago, six, seven years. It was one winter in Copenhagen at a big café-theatre. And there was a lovely, lovely little song in Danish that went with it. Wait a minute: this is how it went.”

She sang a few words in a low, memory-haunted voice, that quenched itself finally in a shiver.

“Ugh! That does not make me feel very gay, after all. I do not like to remember those days to-night. I was so poor, my dear! As poor as a goat in an alley! Sometimes I could not even keep warm. My fingers would be blue, — often, often!”

She was inserting another roll, when Susan announced supper.

“Oh, good!” she exclaimed. “I never was so hungry since the day I was bore. Come, Lippo, you will see what lovely, lovely things that dear soul of a Susan can cook!”

She gave him a luminous smile of invitation, and led the way out of the room, her shimmering, pale-green robe rippling behind her like a broken wave that clings with cool foam-fingers to the sand as it retreats.

To Philip, casting a final backward glance into the apartment she had quitted, it appeared already barren and commonplace. A light, a magic had been taken from it. He would have had a horror of being left alone there, where the elfin music of her voice was

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not, nor the forest mystery of her eyes, nor the dream-like beauty of her hair. Where she was, were dazzlement, intoxication, and a little forgetfulness; where she was not, were staring, remorseless truth, trampled honour, and agonies of spirit.

On the hearth the fire blazed more and more fitfully, more and more uncertainly, falling slowly into embers, which glowed, grew dull, and turned to ashes. Ashes, after the enchantment of the fire had ceased.

VII

It was already past the Colonel's prescribed bed-time; but for once Georgia permitted herself to offer no protest. She saw that he was in no humour for sleep. He had something to say to her. She guessed what it was, and had instinctively sought to delay the moment of confidence. She had continued reading to him until the three quick flickers of the electric lamp had announced the retiring hour. Then she had carefully inserted a marker in the volume, and laid it by. The furtive hope had come to her that possibly her father would wait until the next day.

"But I am not going to bed yet," Colonel Raeburn had observed, quietly. "I want to talk with you a little while."

The subdued intentiveness of his voice told her that nothing would be gained by objecting. She knew every mood of her father's. It was only by a constant observance of his moods and a tactful adaptation of her manner in accordance with them that she had succeeded in achieving in him a measurable degree of submissiveness to the petty tyrannies of invalidism. She knew when a little wheedling and petting would make him amenable to the hated orders of his doctors; she knew when pleading, when arguing, or dire threats

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might severally be of avail; and she knew equally well — which was, perhaps, her chief genius as a manager — the moods in which no tactics of diplomacy need be resorted to, the Colonel's resolution having been immovably taken contrariwise.

To-day he had been exceptionally docile. Since the doctor's visit that morning there had been a quiet, meditative abstraction in his manner that she understood only too well the meaning of. This evening she knew that he had not been listening to her reading. She had not given attention to it herself. Every time that her eyes had turned to him, sitting there so patiently, so calmly, in his invalid chair, under the shaded lamp, she had felt the choke come in her throat.

She loved him for being so difficult and restive under the galling exactions of sanatorium routine — like the stricken captain of Syria who had journeyed to the Hebrew prophet and could scarcely be persuaded to follow out his fantastic, childish-seeming prescription. But she adored him for the simple dignity and quietness with which he could receive any of the great shocks of human life, making no vain protest, indulging in no womanish emotion.

That too was the warrior in him; the imperturbability of a soul that had seen Death stalking down Antietam's Bloody Lane, and reaping his thousands in the slaughter-pen of Fredericksburg. What terrors had the grim spectre for him?

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She wished that she could face the future with equal serenity. Since the moment for his confidence had come, she inwardly braced herself to receive it with the dignity and self-possession, at least of manner, that befitted his daughter.

There was a brief silence, while the Colonel gazed thoughtfully into the obscurity of the farther part of the room. At last he remarked, in a casual tone: —

“Dr. Tyler told me that he had had a long talk with you yesterday.”

He had spoken casually; and it gave her the excuse to answer in the same fashion, disregarding, for the moment, the under-meanings. She would not be the first to commit herself.

“Yes, I had a long talk with him,” she affirmed. “He wanted to know more about your army record; and I gave him good measure. Before I finished, I had told him about Antietam and Fredericksburg and Gettysburg and the Wilderness. He appeared immensely interested, and kept asking questions. His father was in the Pennsylvania Bucktail Regiment at Gettysburg; and he remembered having heard from him, years and years ago, the story of how you captured the flag of the Fourteenth Tennessee.”

Even as a child Georgia had been proud to recite this brilliant exploit of her father’s, which had won him the United States Medal of Honor.

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It was during Pickett's historic charge. The Connecticut regiment, reduced to but a few more than a hundred men, was firing from behind the famous stone wall. Twice the oncoming lines of Confederate infantry had wavered and broken at the rail-fence under the raking fire, only to be succeeded by the next in order. At last they had halted in the shelter of the fence. In pursuance of some earlier command the colour-bearers and their guards had still advanced, and planting their flags, had dropped to the ground beside them to escape the storm of musketry. One colour-bearer, more reckless than the rest, had advanced to within ten rods of the Union line.

"We must have that flag," declared Colonel Bright. "Who will volunteer?"

In an instant Major Raeburn and two others dashed over the wall and were off. One fell dead before he had gone twenty paces. The second was wounded in the leg. By a miracle Raeburn had escaped the shots of the enemy and, waving his sabre over the prostrate colour-guard, seized the colours with a shout of triumph and started again for the stone wall. The same moment a minie ball shattered his right arm. The sabre fell from his grip; but the flag was saved. He achieved the Union lines again, thrust the colours into the hands of Colonel Bright, and fell unconscious into the arms of a fellow-officer.

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Twice already he had been wounded in the defence of his country. In his very first battle, Antietam, a rebel ball had fleshed his leg, and he had lain for forty hours in the rain and cold of the terrible Ploughed Field, without any further attentions than those which a prostrate comrade, crawling to his side, had been able to administer. And yet (this was to Georgia the most thrilling story of all) when the troops were moved across the Potomac two weeks later, he had marched at the head of his company, marched there without giving a sign of pain or fatigue, until unconsciousness came upon him, and he dropped to the roadside. She liked to tell, too, how a poor old country-woman, Granny Creeling by name, had let them carry him into her bare little cottage, and how she and her daughter, Judy, had tended him through the fever that followed, until, six weeks later, refusing a furlough, he had been able to join the regiment again at Bolivar Heights.

“Hotspur” was the name he had won for himself in the regiment. He had seemed actually to be courting death, so uncannily audacious were many of his exploits. Who could blame Georgia for being proud of her father?

Just now he listened to her with fond attention as she offered her eager recital of her talk with the doctor; but when she had done he made no comment; and she realized, with a certain mortification, that she

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had gained nothing by this obstinate delay. The truth was to come out.

“But he told me,” pursued the Colonel, with quiet decisiveness, “that he had spoken to you on another subject. There is therefore no need of repeating what he said to me.”

She gave him a grave look which no longer evaded the issue.

“Yes, he told me,” she said. “He asked if you had better be informed. I said, ‘Certainly,’ — that what he had to say would be neither much of a surprise nor much of a shock to you. I knew you would want to know the truth.”

Her voice was quite calm, almost matter of fact, in its tone; but in the silence of the apartment it seemed to acquire a startling loudness which dismayed her.

“I did want to know the truth,” he said. “I’m glad I know it now. He gives me six months; perhaps a year; possibly even more. I could almost hope *not* more.”

He sighed, and leaned his head, with an air of great fatigue, against the cushions of the chair-back.

For a moment the girl gave no sign of having heard the words, only sat there motionless in the stiff little chair, her hands limp in her lap.

“Did he not tell you that, daughter?” asked the old man, finally, turning his tired eyes upon her.

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"No," she replied, dully, "not that: — I mean, not that about the six months."

"I pressed him for a statement, and that was his answer," he explained, gravely. "I thought best that you should know. I see no reason for telling anything to any one else, do you? Aunt Min would make a tragedy out of it. She'd be brooding over it all day long, and lie awake with it at night. But I knew you could be trusted to take it sensibly."

The girl was looking hard at the window-curtain across the room. She noticed that the pattern on it was in little clocks, connected by zig-zag threads. It was not a very pretty pattern, she thought. She felt as if she were suffocating, and was surprised to hear herself giving an automatically appropriate answer to her father's words.

"Yes, we will keep it to ourselves," she said. "That will be the most sensible way."

As she spoke, a thrill of pride came over her at the thought of the high place her father was according to her in his confidence. They two, and no one else! They two, while the weeks grew into months, to watch the appointed day creep closer and closer, and to watch it with no betraying fear.

"When a man gets to be seventy-three," said the Colonel, quietly, "he knows that at best his course is almost completed. Though by reason of strength his years may pass the allotted three-score and ten,

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yet is their strength but labour and sorrow. What does a year, more or less, matter?"

The girl looked at him with a steady, courageous smile out of eyes in which there was no sign of tears.

"It matters, father. Everything matters to those who love you. But what matters most of all, since the time is short, is that you should be just as happy and comfortable as possible."

"Not that! — Not that, girl!" cried the Colonel, with a sudden, inexplicable outburst of feeling. "What matters most is that I should be at peace with my Maker!"

His eyes flashed, and he brought his hand down heavily on the arm of his chair.

Georgia was not unaccustomed to vehement declarations of this sort on the part of her father; yet they always disquieted her strangely. She could never quite reach up to the Sinaitic fervour of his religion: there was a passionate intensity, a prophetic zeal in it that was all outside the range of her own experience, and which she could only regard from afar. It was not a religion of comfort. It often seemed to her that it was more a whip across bleeding shoulders than a balm for wounds. Yet she knew that nothing was more vital in the composition of his character than this austere, eloquent, consuming faith. Warrior and prophet — that was her father.

But at the present moment she felt only a fleeting

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pain that he should have so sternly corrected her in her attempt to ease his burden. The Colonel must have seen the betrayal of it in her countenance, for his manner altered at once.

“But next to that duty,” he said, in a more gentle voice, “which throughout life is the thing that matters most, what you say may be true. It is at least worth taking into account. There is no reason why I should not be where I am most comfortable and happy. There is one place, Georgia, and only one, where I long to be.”

There was no need to speak the word. The girl’s thoughts flashed back to their beloved hill country with a yearning that rivalled his in its intensity.

“I asked Dr. Tyler about that, too,” he went on, after a brief silence. “He agrees with me that I shall be better off there. I think we may as well go at once.”

“At once!” The girl echoed the words faintly, scarcely daring to believe them.

“He said it would make very little difference — if any difference at all — in the progress of events. When I needed it, he said, I should have a trained nurse. But there was nothing to be gained now, he said, by medical advice. ‘You will be less restless at home,’ he said, ‘amid familiar surroundings.’ He gave you, Georgia, a very hearty word of praise for your intelligent and devoted care.”

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"Did n't he think you were worth it?" demanded the girl, with a luminous smile.

"These last months have been a heavy strain for you," the Colonel pursued, ignoring her question. "And those ahead will not be easier, I fear. But there will be more compensations."

"When shall we start?" asked Georgia.

"The sooner the better. Could we get off to-morrow night, do you think, by the Bay State Special? I am jealous of every day."

Georgia believed she could get the packing done in time. She would make a beginning that night.

"Perhaps I should take that as a hint to be off to bed," said the Colonel. "Give me a hand, will you, my girl?"

She offered a little support behind the shoulder from which hung the empty sleeve, and he rose to his feet. At the door of the inner room he halted, and gazed solemnly into her strong, beautiful countenance.

"God has been very good to me," he said. "I praise him daily that since, in his Infinite Wisdom, he took your brother from us, he blessed me with a daughter who is both son and daughter to me."

She drew down his stern, fond face to hers, and kissed him tenderly. A few minutes later, as soon as he had been settled for the night, she was free to withdraw to her own little bedroom, on the opposite side of their living apartment; and without turning on the

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light, she sat for a long time on the broad bare window-ledge, gazing out into the palely luminous night.

How baffling and mysterious life was, bringing thus to her, in equal hands, and at the same moment, grief and joy! The two emotions did not neutralize each other. Nor did either drown the other or obscure it, for more than an instant, from consciousness.

Her father had six months to live! — She was going to see Philip again! — Six months! — Six days! —

She had not recognized until that moment how deep had been the disappointment of sacrificing the home trip. She had dismissed it from mind as simply and resolutely as she could, seeing the incontestable necessity of the change of plan. Her letter to Philip had been cold, almost. She could not have borne to have him think that she was not glad to be where her father needed her. But now! —

Oh, now she would open her whole heart to him, telling him everything except the one thing that was to be told to no one. A great longing for him came over her, as she pondered on the meeting so soon to come. His love was going to be so dear to her, so strengthening, in the months through which she was about to pass.

She wondered whether she had ever given him any idea of how much he did mean to her already, how much that was rich and new he had brought into her life — without her asking for it! — how much she re-

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lied on him in her heart for strength and sympathy. She would try to tell him that — something of it — to-night, before she began her packing; and the rest she would tell him six days hence, amid their dear hills, where the witch-hazel would be blooming under the white-gleaming sky of November. Oh, how happy, how happy, she would be to feel herself once more in his strong, protecting arms, that gave her courage for every hard duty, that restored her faith in herself, and made her sure that life was rich and beautiful!

She switched on the light, and seated herself at the little writing-desk; but it was midnight before the short letter was completed.

“Oh, Philip, dear,” ran the last, eager paragraph of it, “are you half as happy, I wonder, as I am, at the thought of what is ahead for us! I have sat so long in the tower, — how long I have not known till to-night! — and now my knight-errant is coming home to me from his roaming afar, bringing his first trophies of conquest and achievement. I shall be counting the hours of every day, dear knight, blessing them as they go, because each brings you nearer, nearer, to

“Your loving GEORGIA.”

VIII

ABOUT four o'clock in the morning Victorine, who had just carried in a hot soapstone to the old maman, heard the turn of a latch-key in the front door and cautious steps mounting the stairs. Her first thought was that it might be her brother Victor, returning late from the kitchen of the hotel. But she had never known him to be so late as this. She listened attentively for the opening of the door of the second-floor apartment which he and Jenny occupied; but no, the steps continued.

There was the creak of the loose board in the second flight. Well, it could not be the strange Monsieur Barry, for he had not gone out at all, she was certain. But there was only one other lodger in the mansarde.

Victorine's philosophy of the other sex was not without its touch of Gallic cynicism. "They are only men," she was wont to say. "They must have their pleasures, I suppose." Nevertheless there came a little pang of disappointment with the discovery she had just made; and before she settled herself comfortably for her final sleep, she heaved a deep sigh. She had believed, somehow, that the new young man was a little different. He had seemed so. There was a frank, boyish charm about him that had won a place

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in her heart, in spite of his way of filling the house with pests.

As for Philip, he had hastily flung off his clothes in the dark mansarde and crawled into bed. Five minutes later he was asleep. And no one was left in the house to listen to the sounds of the city's awakening life — the rumble of the milk-wagons and the market trucks on the paving-stones outside, the first click of the mail-box at the next corner — except the little old maman, whose feet would not get warm, and who kept up a fretful, worried cough, much like the scratching of a fowl on gravel.

It was the pale glare of sunlight on his pillow that roused the boy at last from a drug-like sleep which still hung numbly upon his limbs and eyelids. At the moment of waking there comes into the face of every human being, no matter what his character or condition, a fleeting look of simple wonder and inquiry which is utterly childlike. The eyes have opened upon a world still strange, the lineaments of which only gradually interpret themselves into a known order. For a few seconds Philip saw nothing but the odd light that poured over his bed from the southward-facing window; then, automatically, he reached for his watch; and the next instant, still in a daze, he was sitting upright in bed, gazing about him.

Something cried out to his bewildered consciousness, like a voice just too far away to be distinguish-

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able. He had been somewhere. Something had happened to him. A dim impression of distaste invaded his mind.

Suddenly his eyes fell with recognition upon his evening clothes lying in a negligent heap on the table; and at once, with a sharp, agonizing dismay, he remembered: remembered everything with the vivid, total clarity of a photographic record. The whole adventure assailed his mind with terrible, overwhelming effectiveness, as if it had been taking up a position of vantage during the hours of slumber, lying in wait, training its deadly artillery upon him for the moment when he should come to himself.

He had a sickening fear of the day ahead that must be lived. The world was loathsome to him. He believed that he must carry in his countenance the brand of his baseness; and on an impulse of morbid curiosity, like one who studies a facial disfigurement to discover whether it is truly as bad, or not quite so bad as his memory of it, he leapt out of bed and confronted himself in the mirror. Was there a treacherous expression about the mouth that he had not seen before? It might be a trick of the muggy light, which gave a yellow, sickly look to his skin. Yet even after he had been brought back more into the current of everyday sensation by a cold plunge, the conviction remained that an actual change to something meaner and uglier had taken place in him.

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He had proved that he was as weak as the weakest. Weaker. He had been given every bond, every prop to keep him loyal to the best that was in him; and he had lightly broken away from them all. Where was the honest, manly pride he had rejoiced in but the previous afternoon, that he could tell her everything without shame? Would he ever be without shame again? His soul would henceforth be the home of shame.

He had aspired to be her knight, without fear and without reproach. Though she might never have known what the cost of the conflict had been to him, he had made a vow to carry himself stainless and unattainted in his lady's honour. And now, deliberately, with full knowledge of what he was doing, he had flung off her token and trampled it in the mire.

Two lines of a poem he had once cut from a magazine awoke somewhere in his memory and repeated themselves over and over with horrible distinctness while he was dressing.

I bear her promise in my heart;
Her kiss upon my brow.

Her kiss! How jealous he had been of the honour!

Whose kiss now? — He sickened as he felt a flood of new memories inundating his mind, memories that he knew would fester there always, even though the flood might subside. Thenceforth he must be their

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prey. Like the hideous offspring of Sin and Death they would feed upon their progenitor.

“Her kiss upon my brow!”

Well, that dream was over. Georgia must know, she had a right to know, that her true knight was a libertine. He would tell her. The conviction came that she would never forgive him. He knew so well the high-mettled spirit of the girl, her sensitiveness, the fine, jealous purity of her nature. He conceived the shuddering recoil she would have from the mere idea of further relations between herself and him. The chasm between them was one that could not be passed over.

The paltry speciousness of the excuses he had made the previous day was mercilessly revealed to him now. The fact that she could not come home for the holiday — he had actually used that as a license! She was in trouble. Then, if ever, it had been laid upon him to be loyal; to show her that he could be as brave as she in accepting a harsh necessity. Instead he had thrown his birthright and his high privilege to the winds.

And whatever permits Nature might stand ready to issue, there was a law written in his own heart, the letter of which he could never doubt, — never had doubted, — only sought means of evading.

There was not one thought, one memory, that could relieve the bitterness of that hour. His treachery had

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been complete, voluntary, even striven for, and carried out in the full light of the facts.

Dressing with unusual haste, because of the advanced time, Philip allowed himself just two or three minutes to look at his pets before rushing away to the office.

Victorine, who was in the kitchen when he entered, discreetly contented herself with a "Good-morning, monsieur. Are you not a little late to-day?"

"Yes," he answered curtly. "I overslept."

"Ah, I see," she said.

He gave her a sharp look; but her face was perfectly expressionless.

"How was the fish?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Not too bad," she replied.

Papa Victor was in his chair by the stove, a relic of a man, all legs and arms, now, like a spider, but once — as you might infer from the pendulousness of the skin about his cheeks and neck — of rotund proportions. He was by no means satisfied with Victorine's account of the fish. Perhaps he aimed at a restoration of himself into her good graces.

"Oh, de fish!" he declared, rubbing his brown hands over one another with reminiscent relish. "He was mos' appetissant, monsieur. And his Sauce Café Antoine was precisely to the just consistence — eh, Susanne, were we not agree' as to dat? Our

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Victorine is in fact of a marvellous skill wid de fish."

Victorine hunched her neck contemptuously. "What is a fish?" she demanded. Evidently the papa Victor was still out of favour.

The old man protested in a thin, cracked voice, while his head wagged a little on its shrivelled stalk. "Non, non, ma Torine. De fish, he eez difficile — ver' difficile! He tak' a good cook. I would razzer a tousan' time do a meat dan a fish. De fish, monsieur, he have a delicatesse, a —"

"Tiens, mon père," interrupted Victorine, authoritatively, "you are talking too much. Mister Philip wishes to visit his hospital."

She made a great clatter in the dish-pan, and added, without looking around, "The cat is dead, I see."

"What!" cried Philip, in dismay, and darted from the room.

It was true. He only stopped to assure himself of the fact.

"When did it happen, do you know?" he demanded, hoarsely, reentering the kitchen.

Victorine's dishes ceased their clatter only long enough for her to reply, without turning her head,

"No, monsieur, I know nothing. About eleven o'clock I hear a terrible noise of cat and dog. I did not know what it could mean. I thought perhaps it would be better to tell you about it, in case there

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might be some trouble ; so I go to call you ; but I think you are not at home.”

A horror came over the boy. This too ! It seemed so appropriate a retribution that he had no protest to offer. He did not even ask Victorine whether she had made any effort to avert the catastrophe. His little charge was dead, and it was because he had neglected it.

Drawing out a half dollar from his pocket, he offered it shyly to the papa Victor.

“Would you have the leisure, sir, to dig a little grave for it, some time to-day, in the garden ?”

“Under ze fence, where one day it would be so happy to been walking, mon ami ?” supplied the old man, quick to appreciate the sentimental possibilities of the situation. “Wid pleasure ! And if Torine has catch a mouse in her trap, I bury de mouse wid him — between his two little pattes, so ! — de mouse dat he never, never will eat — hein ?”

All that day Philip’s soul was in torment. Times beyond number he must go over the same round of cruel reflections that he had entered upon with his first waking thoughts. There was no relief ; no forgetfulness. Every fact stood out with merciless distinctness in a light without shadows. A crushing fatigue that had no drowsiness in it came upon him as the hours passed. His eyes ached ; his head throbbed with pain ; remorse and shame lacerated his mind. Only

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a nature of noble susceptibilities could have felt so pitilessly the irretrievableness of the thing he had done. Many men of his acquaintance — self-respecting men, working beside him there in the draughting room — would have seen nothing very reprehensible in his misstep. For him, too, time might dull the shame, and ingenuity find apology. But not yet. Just now he could only remember that he had proved renegade to a high pledge; that he had been false to the best thing in his life.

A half hour before closing time, feeling quite unable to keep at his draughting any longer, he quitted the office, and walked home alone by way of the waterfront. In the murky yellow twilight, he felt himself passing through a city of lepers. The din of the ferry-whistles, the rumble of the drays, the rough, profane voices of stevedores and truckmen, the rush and bang of the elevated trains a block or two distant, assaulted his ears like some fever nightmare, confused, terrific, overwhelming. A great horror of life settled upon his spirit. How brutal, how crude, how pitiless! He knew it now, to the rotten core of it!

There was one thing that he must do. He must write to Georgia. Once he had done that, he did not care much what might happen afterwards.

Reaching his Mullin Street lodgings at last, he noticed a letter on the hall-way stand. It was too dark to distinguish the address. Pressing the envelope to

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his nostrils, he recognized the faint fragrance. He could make out a special-delivery stamp in the corner. — It flashed over him that the Colonel must have had a relapse. Perhaps at this very moment Georgia was anxiously waiting by his bedside.

With the envelope tight clutched in his hand, he rushed up to his room, lit the gas, and read the joyful, loving paragraphs the girl had written in the midnight silence of her little chamber. An unstayable flood of tears welled into his eyes. He flung himself on the bed, and sobbed, like a broken-hearted child.

IX

HE did not write the letter after all. He tried more than once, but without success. The thought that he was going to see her so soon stood in his way. All these hard things of which she must be told could be better spoken than written. It was a franker, simpler, more manly way. To write them seemed an attempt to evade the humiliation of telling them. He was not seeking to evade humiliation. He was in a mood even to welcome it. Before her very eyes he would bare his shame, sparing himself no infliction of veracity.

And beyond, who could say? The hope began to grow in him that perhaps there might yet be forgiveness. If she saw how cruelly in earnest he was; if she could only comprehend the quality of his resolutions for the future; and if — possibly — she could recognize how peculiarly belaying was the mesh of circumstances in which he had been taken, he felt almost confident that she would not refuse him another chance. His disloyalty might have been as deliberate and calculated as it had seemed to him in his worst moments of self-contempt. At the same time there could be no denial of the fact — he saw it plainly enough as the intensity of his first mood gradually subsided — that the series of incidents which had

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ended by throwing him out of his bearings was almost as if prearranged for that purpose, so insidious was its adaptation to the quality of his own temperament.

Georgia *must* see that. If he told her everything exactly as it had come to pass, he believed that she would be able to make allowances. He had no thought of excusing himself; he did not desire to make wrong seem right; but he had confidence that the truth, scrupulously and unreservedly uttered, might justify a hope of forgiveness.

And he wanted to be forgiven! He had never loved Georgia so much as now, when he felt himself cast out from her presence. She became synonymous in his mind with everything that was beautiful and noble and of good report in his own heart; she was his aspiration; his religion; the thing he prayed some day to be worthy of.

Instead of the letter, therefore, he sent a note, welcoming her home, and telling her that he would ride out to Highstone for a little first visit Wednesday evening if his railroad connections did not fail him. They did not. About eight o'clock in the evening he descended at Folkbridge, went directly to the livery stable, and hired a mount.

He was not going to take time to drop in at Judge Burchell's first. He knew that his mother and step-father would be indifferent as to the hour of his

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arrival; and he dreaded the delays of greetings and the conspicuousness of a hasty departure for Highstone.

In a peculiar degree the Burchells seemed to him not his own people. Since the remarriage of his mother, ten years ago now, new children had been born to her. An utterly different set of ties and interests absorbed her. At first Philip had been acutely and painfully conscious of the relaxation of the old intimacy; but he had ended by accustoming himself to it and asking nothing more from her than she was able to give. That was not much. A woman of self-centred and rather petty disposition, it was inevitable that her heart should be engrossed with present concerns of which he knew little, and that the gulf between them should widen.

The tie of the past that meant most to him in the home town was his affection for little Aunt Prudence, his father's sister, who still kept the old Wetherell house, and with whom he could freely talk of other days, and of the brave, handsome, ill-fated young father who had been the god of his boyhood's idolatry. But Aunt Prue also he would see to-morrow. To-night there was other business on hand.

Drawing on a pair of borrowed riding-boots, he mounted the little roan, and was off, — down the quiet, lamp-lit street, across the bridge, and into the open country. It was a mild November night, with a

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creeping, dream-like mist in every hollow, under a moon almost full. He felt the physical exhilaration of the vigorous exercise. The rhythmic pound of his horse's hoofs on the dry roadway was the sweetest music he had heard for many months, and his whole being yielded to it with the joyful ease and alacrity of old custom.

How tall and still the East Woods appeared in the moonlight! How magically lovely was the veiled gleam of the old mill-pond through the serried tree trunks!

Out of the woods, — up and up, slowly, through broad, moon-flooded fields! In one of them the great autumnal shocks of corn were still standing, evenly distanced from one another, ranks of wild, tattered women, wind-blown, and with arms flung abroad. Here and there he saw a shock that had been beaten down and that crouched, with its head almost to the ground, a Hagar in effigy, bewailing the outcast children of summer.

The man's soul leapt and thrilled before the melancholy beauties of the autumn night. For a few brief minutes he had forgotten everything, except that he was once more on a horse's back and passing through the country of heart's desire. But not for long. As he drew nearer to the Raeburn estate the horrible business he must transact crowded upon his consciousness with crushing force. How brutally out of

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accord with such a night of dreams! — but he must tell her.

At a tall gateway, topped with broken lanterns, he turned in. His mare fell into an easy trot; and they passed up the neglected avenue that had once been the pride of the county. At a turn of the drive the house came suddenly full into view, a tall colonial structure, moon-white under a tangling mantle of wistaria and woodbine that had mounted ambitiously from porch to roof, and hung in dark, luxuriant streamers from the lofty eaves.

There were lights in the downstairs windows. That was the library — the Colonel's favourite retreat. Perhaps she was there with him at this moment. Perhaps she had already heard the dull clatter of his horse's hoofs. Of a sudden his teeth began to chatter, as if with fear. He locked his jaws fast together, drew rein before the porch, and leapt to the ground.

Before he had reached the steps, however, the tall front door opened and shut, and in the momentary flash of light from within, he saw Georgia coming to him. For an instant his limbs refused to move, and he stood there, shaken with a nervous chill, in the drive-way, looking at her and trying to speak. He saw her dimly as she crossed the dark porch; and then she emerged into the full light of the moon, radiant, dazzling, a creature of that dreaming night, and yet flesh and blood, ready to be taken into his arms. She de-

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scended the steps with swift, easy grace and came toward him, her eyes alight with the rapture of the meeting.

“Philip — oh, Philip, — how dear of you to come way out here to-night!”

He had tried to speak. He had tried to cry out, “Stop. Don’t come near me!” But the words would not utter themselves from his paralyzed lips. He no longer knew what he was doing. The touch of her hand, the welcome of her waiting lips, robbed him of his last shadow of reason. With a smothered cry, he enfolded her in his arms. The wild thought came to him that it was for the last time; that never again would she come to him like this, inviting his embrace.

“Oh, you are shivering,” she said, at last, in a voice of tender reproach. “How rash of you to come out on such a night without warm gloves and a riding-coat. You must have forgotten what our country November is like.”

The man answered her in a dazed, absent voice, like one but partly awakened from a trance. “Oh, — yes, — I must have forgotten. I did not know it would be so cold.”

She gave him an anxious look and was about to speak, when a bell rang inside the house.

“That’s father,” she said. “He probably thinks I ought not to be out here without something on my

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head; but, oh, I could n't wait when I heard you. Now you're going to come in and talk to him, are n't you? He's been asking about you."

"Yes," answered Philip, automatically. "If he'd like to see me, — of course."

In his mind he saw the purpose of the evening already miscarried. If the Colonel was there, and wanted to see him, there would be no chance to tell Georgia — unless, possibly, the chance might come after the invalid had retired. There was the quick lifting of a load from his spirit, as from that of a condemned prisoner, granted an hour's reprieve.

"Just tie her in the barn, Philip," she said, "and come right into the library. We'll be waiting for you."

She turned and ran up the steps into the house. When he followed her, a few minutes later, he was conscious that his pulses were running under pressure. A clear, brilliant excitement, an unnatural ease had taken possession of him.

As Georgia rose to admit him, it came to her that she had never seen him looking so handsome or so happy. How well the new life must be agreeing with him!

Colonel Raeburn was comfortably settled in a deep easy-chair before the library fire, with a blanket about his knees. He smiled in a most friendly manner as Philip entered, and extended his left hand.

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"You will excuse my not getting up, Philip," he said. "But there's all the hands I possess, and I'm right glad to welcome you."

"Is n't it splendid, sir," said the young man, "that they consented to let you come home after all! It must mean that you are much better than some of us had begun to fear."

The Colonel regarded him with another frank smile. "Yes," he replied, jocosely, "I esteem myself fortunate to have escaped from that place with my skin. I began to think they had given me a life sentence. — Eh, Georgia?"

"Father does not take kindly to sanatoriums," she laughed. "I am glad you were not there, Philip, to see the horrible fuss he made over every littlest thing the doctors ordered."

The Colonel grunted. "It's no life for a man of my years," he declared. "It may do very well for women and for the puling, round-shouldered youth of the present generation."

At the girl's direction, Philip drew up to the fire, and while he was warming himself, she gave him an account of the home trip and of the plans for the winter.

"You're going to be here right along now?" he asked.

She nodded, and for an instant an expression came into her eyes that he did not know how to interpret.

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"Yes," she said, "right, right here. They're not going to get us away again, are they, dad?"

"No one can guess," said the old man, "save he who has languished in a sanatorium, how good it is to be on our own heath, under our own roof."

A little later the conversation turned to Philip and his life in town.

"Georgia has been singularly reticent," declared the Colonel. "I believe I do not even know where you live. Is it in the newer up-town region?"

Philip volunteered a vivacious description of his lodgings in Greenwich.

"You may recognize the house," he said, "by a little sign in the front window: 'The New York Correspondence Institute of Auto-health.' What auto-health may be, or why it needs an institute, I cannot say. So far I have seen only two persons who appear directly connected with the concern, — a tall, dark, non-committal-looking man, and a fair, pug-nosed stenographer, who collects the mail from a special mail-box in the front hall and seems to feel very heavily the burden of the world's woe. I call her a stenographer. For aught I know she may be a priestess."

He went on to describe his landlady, the stolid, shrewd, unsentimental Victorine.

"Behold," he said, taking his blank-book from his pocket, and rapidly sketching down a few telling lines. "Her proportions are about as four to one, — thus.

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Here is the boundless waist-line ; here stand the shoulders. This hand brandishes a long spoon dangerously ; the other clutches a mustard-box — so ! ”

The Colonel was immensely entertained. “ But you must give us some features,” he demanded, not satisfied with the vacant oval by which the countenance of Victorine was indicated.

“ That’s not so easy,” said Philip. “ However — here’s the mouth,” — he drew a single short, straight line, — “ set like the two jaws of a pair of pincers. There are the eyes,” — he put in two dots, — “ small and hard as shoe-buttons, under a low, level brow-line, thus. — There, I think that will do for the redoubtable Victorine *La Bergère*.”

Charmed with the young man’s facile talent at caricature, of which he had often heard, the Colonel would not let him stop until he had accorded similar treatment to the other members of the Mullin Street household : the papa Victor, the maman Susanne, the young Victor, who was one of the cooks at the *Lafayette*, and Jenny, his ill-assimilated wife, whose maiden name had been *Mahoney*, and who had very red hair, and who had persuaded her husband, for social, unprofessional uses, to change his name to *Shepherd*, which, she said, was the same thing as the French word, which she could n’t and would n’t pronounce, and made quite as decent, American-sounding a name as *Mahoney*. But Victorine had scornfully averred that

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if she wanted to be honest, she must change her name to Shepherdess; and refused to be persuaded that such an act was not quite as suitable as the other.

Philip had never talked so freely and engagingly before. No one could have been more surprised than he; but as the Colonel constantly pressed him forward, he let the words carry him along.

“Are n’t there any other lodgers?” inquired the invalid, reluctant as a child to see the boy closing his book.

“Why, yes, there’s one on my floor. But he’s not the sort to be inconsiderately put down on paper and dismissed. In fact I have come to believe that he is quite a wonderful man. I never exchanged half a dozen words with him before last week; but since then I’ve seen him several times. Barry, his name is,—tall, gaunt, ragged, but withal very distinguished-looking.”

He made a few half-random strokes in the middle of a page; then appeared to be seized with an idea.

“I think perhaps I could hit off his profile,—it’s very pronounced, very unusual.”

“What’s his business?” inquired Georgia, as he bent over his sketch.

“I don’t know about that. I think he’s in some commercial laboratory. But I suspect somehow that’s not his real vocation. There’s something a little mysterious about him.”

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"A mystery! Delightful!" cried the girl. "Do tell us some more."

"In the evening," pursued Philip, disjointedly, not relaxing his attention, "he's always doing microscopic work on some embryological cross-sections — some obscure class of tunicates, I believe."

"Tunicates? What are those, pray?" quizzed Georgia.

"Nothing, he says, of the least importance to any one, now or ever, except as a bit of research for pure science. He says that if he ever found it was going to do anybody any good, he'd drop it. Oh, he's no humanitarian, I can tell you. He's utterly noncommunicative about himself; but I fancy his life has been a peculiarly hard one."

He held out the beginnings of his sketch for scrutiny at arm's length.

The girl gave a low exclamation. "I believe you've forgotten what you're doing, Philip. — Look there."

She sprang to her feet and turned the Colonel's head with her two hands so that its patrician profile was revealed to him.

"You've borrowed father's forehead and nose."

Philip had to admit the resemblance.

"I had never thought of it before," he said, "but there is a kind of similarity in the profiles. The build of the Colonel's face is much more rugged, though, and his chin, if I can judge of it fairly through the

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beard, heavier and firmer. Indeed, I lose the resemblance entirely as soon as your father's head is turned toward me."

"How old is he?" put in the Colonel. "Not my three-score, I take it."

"Forty-odd, I should venture. But often he looks much older than that. He seems to me the most embittered man I ever have known."

"Not much like daddy in that, at all events," put in Georgia, proudly, with a light kiss upon the Colonel's forehead.

Philip agreed with her emphatically. "It does n't seem to be anything forced on him by adversity," he pursued; "but as if it were a very part and parcel of his personality. I don't know how to describe it. I think he must have been at odds with the world from the start."

"You've no idea where he comes from," inquired the Colonel, who was following the conversation with unrelaxed interest.

"He spoke one day of a collection of beetles he had made when he was a boy in Maryland, — I think it was Maryland, I'm not sure. He's the sort of man who might have come from almost anywhere."

He gave another examination to his sketch; then tore it from the book with disgust, crumpled it, and threw it into the fireplace.

"I can't make poor old Barry look right," he de-

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clared. "You put it out of my head, Georgia, with that unhappy comparison."

"I'm sorry," she said, apologetically. "I should n't have interrupted; but all of a sudden it happened to strike me. — Why, father, what's the matter?"

With dismay Philip perceived that the Colonel had sunken back weakly among the cushions, with his hand caught spasmodically to his heart. His face was deathly white.

"You're quite tired out, daddy," she cried, coming solicitously to his side. "It was wicked of me to let you talk so much. I don't see how I could have forgotten to keep watch of the time."

She turned with an accusing smile upon their visitor.

"That's your fault, Philip, for being so interesting. That can't be excused."

"I'm all right," said Colonel Raeburn, smiling resolutely. "It was just one of those childish faint turns I have sometimes. It's not Philip's fault at all. — Don't let her blame you, my boy. You've given us a delightful evening."

"But you must be good, now," added the girl, with gentle peremptoriness, "and let me see you to your room."

The old man made no protest. Philip gathered from Georgia's look that she felt more concern than her words implied; and he judged it expedient to

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hasten his own departure, that she might be at liberty to devote herself to the invalid.

“I must be off,” he said. “On my word, I had not intended to stay half so long. I hope your father is not seriously overtired.”

“Not at all,” put in the Colonel, stoutly.

The girl’s look thanked him for his timely apprehension of the situation. “A night’s rest, and he will be all the better for this little visit, — won’t you, father?”

She went with Philip to the outer door.

“It’s nothing,” she said, confidently. “It’s gone already. He often has these troublesome turns of weakness — sometimes, like this, lasting only a few seconds. But they always make me a little anxious to get him quiet.”

“If I come over to-morrow, after dinner,” suggested the man, “can we have a tramp together?”

“That will be lovely,” she said, and added, after a little pause, “Oh, Philip, dear, I’m so glad you could come!”

He would not touch her lips again; but he seized her hands and kissed them, while a hot mist, which she did not see, blinded his eyes. The next instant he was gone.

X

GEORGIA returned to the library to find her father on his feet, leaning against the mantelpiece.

“Are you feeling better again, dear?” she asked, anxiously.

He nodded but did not speak.

“It was my fault,” she said. “I’m so sorry. I never noticed how tired you were getting, until all of a sudden when the attack came on. I ought n’t to have let — ”

She was continuing; but he turned upon her a look of tragic tenderness that caused the words to die on her lips.

“Georgia! Georgia!” he cried out, in suffocated accents. “What deserts of mine ever won me from God the blessing of such a daughter!”

The dread she always felt of his exalted moods came upon her. She tried weakly to turn the torrent. She put out a hand lightly, caressingly, to the collar of his dressing-gown.

“Come, dear daddy,” she said. “Let’s not talk any more now. It’s bed-time.”

He paid no attention to her words, but seized her hand in his own, and gave it a vise-like pressure.

“Not deserts! No!” he broke out with burning

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fervour. “Infinite riches of Grace! Abundance and superabundance of his Mercy! Everlasting Love, ever vouchsafed freely, yea, even unto the chiefest of sinners!”

In terror she strove to release her hand from his clutch. “Father, father,” she pleaded. “If you love me, do not say any more now. Come to bed.”

He stared vaguely for an instant upon her quivering lips, before he seemed to understand what she had said. Then the blaze died from his eyes, and bending to her, he placed a solemn kiss on her brow.

“Praise ye the Lord,” he murmured, in a voice of unaffected devoutness, “for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever. — Remember that, Georgia, — forever! — forever! — Oh, how wonderful are God’s promises!”

He allowed her to lead him to his room, and so long as she was with him was satisfied to talk quietly of indifferent topics. Georgia believed that she was leaving him in something like his normal frame of mind; and after a little chat with Aunt Min — who had been sitting in the dining-room all the evening with her knitting — she retired to her own chamber, a lofty, narrow apartment, just across the hall from her father’s.

She lighted the lamp, slipped into a kimono, loosened her luxuriant dark coil of hair, and sat for a long time in a little low rocker brushing it out, and thinking. It had been a memorable evening in more ways

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than one. Being relieved of any immediate anxiety in regard to her father, her thoughts turned first to that last strange, inexplicable outbreak of his in the library. What could have so profoundly moved him just then? He had been going to say something more, — she had seen it plainly, — when she had implored him to desist. Perhaps about Philip.

It seemed more than possible to her that he had inferred the relationship that existed between them, and that this discovery had for a moment overwhelmed him. There had been an accent of gratitude, certainly, in his voice, quite as clear as the stern, Calvinistic self-humiliation before God.

She asked herself whether it were quite fair to have excluded him from her secret so long. At all events, now that the end of the way was distinctly in sight for him, she believed that he could only be happy in sharing it. The day was past when he could any longer be jealous. He knew that she was his for as long as it was in her power to be his. And she determined that on the next day, when they came back from their walk, if her father seemed in good spirits, they would tell him, together.

How proud she had been of Philip that evening, — of his charm of manner, of his versatility, of his physical beauty, and most of all of his candid manliness. For the first moment of their meeting his manner had puzzled her — his seeming hesitation, his silence,

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and then his embrace, so consumingly eager that at the memory of it she shivered, half with fright, half with rapture. But now she thought that she could understand even that; and she felt very happy in the understanding. How much he *loved* her! What wonderful, mysterious riches of love he had to offer her!

She seemed to feel herself at the threshold of a new experience, vaster and more beautiful than anything she had known hitherto. She would trust herself to it without fear or hesitation, believing that she could grow to the measure of its demands. Love had never seemed so precious nor so sacred to her as just now.

The flame of her lamp grew murky, and a tenuous corkscrew of smoke began to rise from the chimney. The odour brought her with astonishment to notice the time. It was already past midnight.

Hastily extinguishing the light, she made ready for bed by what pale irradiance of the moon reached her through the bare branches of the locust tree outside her window. Then she softly opened the hall-way door, made sure that her night-slippers and bed-wrapper were within reach, and crept into bed.

For a time she lay very quietly, and the last vague reveries that precede slumber had already begun to possess her mind, when she was startled back into full consciousness by a sound. What had it been? She searched the lingering sensation of it, quivering in the recesses of memory. A low cry? A groan? Words?

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No, not words. Perhaps her father had coughed. She tried to assure herself that it had been nothing more than that, and resolutely closed her eyes once more.

But every impulse of slumber had fled afar. She was preternaturally alert. There was an acute yet nameless impression of fear upon her mind: a dim, formless premonition of *something*. The horror of it grew until she thought it would stifle her. Her brain ached with listening. A fit of shuddering came upon her. She lay there in a veritable panic of groundless terror, unable to think, waiting — waiting — for what? The midnight silence of the great house, with its tall, vacant hall-ways and spectral stairs, invaded her imagination like a hostile *being*, ready to leap upon her and annihilate her.

Trembling from head to foot, but resolved at all costs to master her causeless fright, she slipped from bed and noiselessly groped her way into the hall. Directly opposite she could make out the tall black oblong of an open doorway. She tiptoed across to it, and stood for a few seconds crushed against the wall, listening in the darkness for her father's breathing.

Yes, she could distinguish it now. But it was not the regular, placid breathing of sleep. It was spasmodic, hard, broken. The skin of all her body prickled as she suddenly realized to what she was listening. In the darkness and solitude of midnight her father was sobbing.

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Her blood ran cold. She would have fled to her room again; but she was powerless to move. She could do nothing but listen, in an anguish of helpless sympathy, to a sound more tragically heart-breaking than ever in her life she had heard before, — yes, even than the delirious screams she had once heard from the fever-stricken chamber of her dying mother.

There was the slight sound of a creaking bed-spring as the old man changed his position, and then a strained, pulsing silence, in which she pictured him struggling, with all his titanic force of will, to regain his self-control. Then, through the darkness, he cried out:—

“O God, cast me not away in thine anger!”

The words of his supplication were uttered scarcely above a whisper; but they shivered through her soul like destroying lightnings. She reeled, and caught herself by the baluster-post, which creaked ominously. She had a horror of being found there, eavesdropping upon her father’s agony. Feeling her way along the floor with her hands, she half crept, half flew to her room, and hid herself among the bedclothes, her chattering teeth crushed against the pillow.

The house was very still again, with the pregnant, heavy stillness that follows or precedes tragedy. The white moonlight still poured in a level flood through the bare branches of the locust tree and fell in broken radiance over the foot of the bed. She heard one of

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the horses moving restlessly in his stable, far from the house. She thought of Philip, and wished that his arms might be about her in that hour of dread. And with the thought of the enfolding strength and courage of his love, which was hers wherever he might be, through whatever dark ways she might have to tread, her exhausted senses began to relax, and a solemn peace came over her, which once more prepared her for the healing ministrations of sleep.

XI

IF for appearance' sake Philip was a nominal guest of the Burchells during his rare visits to Folkbridge, it was at Miss Wetherell's that he was most frequently to be found. With Aunt Prudence he came very close to the old life that meant so much to him. The house was full of happy memories, tinged with a melancholy of time and change that even more endeared them.

Reminders of his father were on every hand, jealously cherished by little Aunt Prue. She even preserved on the walls of her tiny sewing-room upstairs the yellowed certificate of his graduation from Phillips-Andover and his Yale diploma. She had a fond, familiar way of talking of him, too, almost as if he were still a living presence in the house. The fact that he was dead had never become so much a reality to her as the fact that he had been alive.

It had been so untimely, his death, so utterly without warning, that even now it often seemed to her that perhaps it had not really happened at all, and that at any moment he might come with his alert, athletic stride up the front path from the gate, and enter the house as in the old days, whistling.

A group of half-drunken strikers had gathered in the mill-yard, and they had sent in a brawling chal-

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lence to the officials of the company to come out and talk terms with them. No one had made a move to accept their invitation. The men were known to be in a dangerous mood. At last the newly appointed superintendent, John Wetherell, had risen to his feet with an abrupt, confident determination.

“If we lack the courage to put trust in the honesty of the men, how can we ask them to put trust in our honesty?” he had demanded, and with a fearless smile he had gone out, to fall dead, shot through the heart, before he had spoken another word.

Philip would never forget, so long as he lived, the gallant beauty of his father’s dead face as the men who brought him home lifted the dark blanket that covered their burden. The day was the eleventh of May, thirteen years ago, and the meeting-house clock had just struck noon. Everything that went before that moment in the boy’s life was sharply distinct from everything that came after, wearing a soft, far-away radiance, as if belonging to another sphere of existence.

No day of the year’s cycle could call old memories more potently into life than Thanksgiving, the high ancestral feast. In New England it is preëminently the day with the home-feeling. It is the reunion day of past and present: the celebration of the past’s nobility, the declaration of the present’s loyalty. No day could so thrill Philip with pride to know himself a

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product of New England's three centuries of struggle and faith. And another quality of the feast that greatly appealed to him was its cheerful, robust this-worldliness, its wholesome savour of the soil. No craving of release from our poor mortality, but rather an honest glorying in its rich possibilities! Let us bless God together that the fruits of the ripened year are garnered and heaped by, and that we may properly enjoy them!

To-day, until it should be time to make ready for church, Philip gave his assistance to Aunt Prue in her garden, tying up her precious rose-bushes in sheaves of straw, and setting out a new border of daffodils between the path and the grape-arbour.

“How I delight in the November garden,” said little Aunt Prue. “It reminds me of a child’s nursery at the end of the afternoon, where playthings of all sorts are left scattered about, waiting quietly for the mother to come and put them away for the night.”

Aunt Prue had a vein of whimsical, wayward humour and she liked to indulge it with her nephew. She stood beside him in apron and dog-skin gloves, a man’s working-cap with ear-lappets absurdly pulled down over her small head; and she punctiliously indicated, with the tip of an old umbrella, the spot where he was next to place a bulb.

“It always seems to me,” said Aunt Prue, digging a neat little hole with her indicator, “an explicit act of

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faith to put a seed or a bulb in the ground at this time of year. I believe the Lord must attribute it unto us for righteousness. What reason have we for believing that this lump of brown scales, with its white heart, will sleep safe and warm through the frozen months ahead, to wake with the first rains — ‘before the swallow dares’? I vow, it astounds me every day to see how much faith we unregenerate creatures have, after all. Every act of the day is an act of trust — an expression of confidence in the honesty and reliability of the Universe. Did you ever think of that?”

She was a rare little personage, Aunt Prudence, still scarcely beyond middle age, trim, dainty, choice of diction, sincerely pious, devoted to good works, a visitor of the sick, a friend of the needy, Secretary of the Home Missionary Society, and President of the local branch of the Seaman’s Gospel Association. The latter was by all odds her favourite philanthropy. Had God willed her to be a man, she declared, she would certainly have stuffed her clothes into a pillow-case and run away to sea — a hardy stowaway. Life before the mast appealed to her much more powerfully than the life of the saints in bliss. All seamen, indeed, were the adopted children of her heart; and it was an inconsolable regret of hers that Providence had ordained her lot among inland hills, far from sounding surf and white sails.

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One of her first questions to Philip that morning had been in regard to the life of the water-front in New York. Did he often see the ships come in? Did he sometimes hear the sailors talking their quaint jargon along the wharves? Portuguese, she thought, must be a very interesting language.

But just now her mind was absorbed with the setting of bulbs.

“I wonder,” she ventured, with a pensive smile, as she put the last of her store into Philip’s hand, “I wonder is the little bulb conscious, somehow, of the lovely secret in its heart? Does it feel the stirring within it of the Resurrection Day as the cold earth closes in over its head? With us it is only that knowledge that makes death anything else than a terror. It does not seem to me, indeed, that I could bear to be a bulb unless I knew that some day I should hear the voice of Life, bidding me come forth from the tomb. Did it ever occur to you, nephew, that in their first appearance above ground the little spring things still seem to be wearing their grave clothes tight bound about them, like so many lowly brothers of Lazarus?”

“You ought to have been a poet, Aunt Prudence,” said Philip, with admiring affection, as he completed his labours.

She beamed with pleasure. “Do you think so?” she asked. “I have my little ideas, which amuse me;

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but I don't seem to find it easy to talk of them to most people. With you it's different. I know you won't laugh at me. In that you're like your father."

They walked leisurely toward the house. She felt very proud of her ~~manly~~ nephew, and looked up at him, from under the enormous visor of her working-cap, with glistening eyes.

"You're so like him in many ways, Philip. You have his modesty. I verily believe you've no least notion how handsome you are. I don't see how the young belles of the city can help losing their hearts to you. I dare say they do, for that matter, but that you're too shy to know it."

Philip blushed hotly, and was glad that Aunt Prue had stooped to peer under a great soap-box at a clump of foxglove.

"By the way," she said, very demurely, — "or rather, apropos of nothing, as they say, have you happened to see Georgia Raeburn yet?"

"I am going out to Highstone this afternoon," answered Philip.

"Oh, yes," said the little lady, with the most beguiling simplicity in the world.

They resumed their walk, and had almost reached the house before she spoke again.

"By the way," she said, — "or rather, apropos of nothing, I heard some one come cantering down the bridge road last night about half-past ten. I wonder

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who it would have been, there 's so little riding hereabouts at night."

They looked at each other, and Philip surrendered with a laugh and a blush. The next instant he realized with painful acuteness that he had seemed to admit more than he had any right to admit now. But before he could find words to correct his error, his aunt turned to him with a look of tenderest affection.

"Georgia is a wonderful girl, my boy," she said, "a very capable girl, intelligent, beautiful, devoted, and above all — good. I don't know what better prize I could covet for you."

At twenty minutes past ten they were ready to set out for church. Aunt Prudence had donned a deliciously old-fashioned bonnet, with velvet strings under the chin, and her small hands, delicate and soft as a girl's, wore gloves of white silk. It was one of her whims to be a little quaint; and the fashion of another day became her marvellously. She gave Philip her Bible to carry, and they joined the village procession already on its way toward the white meeting-house.

Neighbours greeted each other at gateways, and fell into line. Philip was recognized and welcomed all along the route by old friends, who invariably expressed astonishment at the way he had grown.

"So ye 're livin' way off to New York," quoth old Sally Blodgett, almost bent double over a cane. "Well, well! — Well, well!"

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She indulged in a wise cackle of laughter through mumblecrust gums. It seemed to Philip that she was the one thing that remained unchanged out of the old world. She had always been just as old, just as bent, as that. He remembered how, at the funeral of his father, she had hobbled up amongst the throng for a last look at the dead face, and suddenly broken out into wild sobbing.

Sally was shaking her head still, with a sage doubt of these modern ways. "I never could see," she professed, "why anybody wants to live clear way off there for."

In every face that morning, so Philip thought, there was to be seen a subdued, self-respecting joyousness. The slanting sunlight of Indian summer filtered its soft radiance through the internetted branches of the tall elms that lined the street. In front dooryards the grass was yet green, and Aunt Prudence discovered, with a little cry of delight, a belated dandelion, blossoming close to the ground by the sidewalk. She made Philip put it in his buttonhole.

"I suppose," said she, "that finding itself alone, all, all alone in a leafless, flowerless world, it must think mighty well of itself. Probably it imagines it is the first of its kind in creation, instead of being only the last and least of the year."

As they reached the little ascent that led to the ancient meeting-house, a severe, square-windowed,

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green-blinded structure like all of its kind in New England, but fronted and set off by a steeple of beautiful proportions and exquisite delicacy of ornament, a phaeton passed them; and Philip turned just in time to see Georgia and Aunt Min. Georgia held reins and whip handsomely. He had always loved to see her with a horse. The pose was one that became her well, answering to the aristocratic distinction of her beauty, — erect, confident, with animated countenance into which the November air had brought a vivid bloom, her lips superbly arched, her head slightly thrown back, her gauntleted hands held well forward on the lines. His heart bounded with pride as she gave him a quick, smiling salutation; then the same old mantle of shame enveloped him.

How vile, how inexplicably perverse his secret seemed on a day and in a setting like this! He could almost believe that the thing had never taken place. A furtive impulse came to him to put it away from him, to say nothing, to act as if nothing had happened. But the impulse passed as quickly as it came. They had always been honest with each other. He would not embark upon deceit now. He would let this lie live in his bosom no longer.

After Aunt Prue he walked soberly down the red-carpeted aisle and entered the pew of memories, sitting in the place his father had always occupied. The congregation rose for the singing of Old Hundred and

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the invocation ; then followed the responsive reading from the Psalter.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."

The rich familiar words fell upon his ears like voices out of another world ; and a choking sensation, which he could not get rid of, came into his throat. Once more he was a very small boy, sitting between stately Aunt Prue and his heroically proportioned father, waiting in eager expectation for the dramatic moment when old Dr. Stickney should portentously unfold the Governor's Proclamation, sealed with the great seal of the State of Connecticut. Whither had the years swept it all away? Where were the other three of the five who had once filled the pew? And what had happened to Aunt Prue, whom he now perceived beside him, a mere mite of a lady, demurely munching a meeting-seed?

And himself! How abundantly he had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the first fruits of which were Shame! How little he had dreamed, in those days, that a day would come when he should be sitting here alone with Aunt Prue, devoured by a festering secret that made every observance of the festival a mockery! The anthem, the scripture lesson, the sermon, all were lost upon him. He was thinking bitterly, while the tears still itched at the back of his

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eyes; and a resolution for the future, stronger than any that had preceded it, was taking form in his heart.

But this was in the land of hills and memories. It was within sight of the girl who was going to forgive him and would be henceforth a strength and inspiration that had never been possible before. And it was far away — farther in years than in miles — from the subtle nets of temptation, spread day and night in the City for the feet of the Young Men.

XII

THEY were sitting on a knob of rock just below the crest of Yelping Hill. Already the afternoon was far spent, and across the purple meadows below, a thin trail of mist was gathering. The rays of the sun came to them wanly from a point close to the western mountain-rim.

The man was staring hard at the ground. His face was set in lines of pain that distorted the mouth and put deep creases about the eyes. His companion sat a little distance from him, with her back partly turned; and she was gazing out across the dream-like country below, seeing nothing. The silence that had come between them since he had ceased speaking had grown almost terrifying; yet no words would form themselves on her dry lips.

“Georgia, Georgia!” he groaned, at last, digging his heel hard into the damp earth. “Are n’t you going to say anything?”

Another silence. She sat there like one petrified. Her stunned brain seemed to know nothing but a dull suffering. Yet she must speak. Something must be said. She clutched her hands together until they hurt, struggling to force down the strangling knot in her throat.

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“What is there to say — Philip?” she asked. Her voice did not seem like a real voice: it was the shrunken, bodiless ghost of a voice, blown to him across countless miles.

“Say that it’s not all over,” he cried, with impassioned vehemence. “Can’t you say that? Surely, — Georgia! — can’t you say that?”

“No,” — she answered with a shudder — “I can’t say that.”

“Do you mean that it *is* all over? You’re not going to let me try again?”

She set her chin upon the back of her hands, and stared unseeingly at the dimmed horizon.

“I mean that you’ve killed everything in me that once cared for you.”

Each word was heartlessly distinct, articulated with a separate and painful effort.

The man let his head sink between his knees, and his body was shaken with uncontrollable spasms of emotion. But no betrayal of it issued from his locked lips. It may be she guessed that her words had broken him as his, but a few minutes earlier, had broken her; but she took no pains to inform herself of the fact. Still her eyes gazed eastward undeviatingly.

“Perhaps what you did, did n’t seem like very much to you,” she forced herself to continue, finally, believing that he had a right to know her thought. “Oh, I dare say I’m old-fashioned and provincial.

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I know it does seem a small thing to a great many people."

"It did n't seem small to me," broke out her companion. "I tried to tell you that. I thought I had made that clear. It seemed to me the most degrading, most disloyal thing I had ever done or could do."

She gave a little mirthless, cutting laugh.

"And you chose to do this most degrading, most disloyal thing the very night you heard I was in trouble."

There was an interval of silence. Her accusation was unanswerable. He had no thought of going over the ground again. To urge mitigating circumstances would be only cowardice at this point. The bare fact was as she had declared it. She was not unjust, even if she was without pity.

"And after you had done it," she went on,—"how many days after? — six? — five? — you came to me, and took me in your arms, and —" She choked at the word, and it was never uttered.

The man groaned. "I insulted you in every way I could devise. I hate myself for it. I loathe myself for a sneak and a cad."

"And so," she asked, after another brief pause, in a voice of unsparing irony, "and so you think it would be natural and altogether desirable for me to keep on loving you."

"I don't ask that. No, — not love me, — you

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could n't do that now. I see it well enough. I did n't see it at first. But at least be a little sorry for me, — could n't you be that? And trust me a little?"

"I don't see any grounds for trusting you again. I do not see what better reason I could offer you now for being true than I have offered in the past. You chose to do what you did. You took time — several hours — to think it over first. — No! No! everything inside me is hard, hard, hard toward you. Oh, it makes me sick to think I let you touch me, and that I was so — so *happy*."

A spasm of revulsion seized her, and she sprang to her feet, saying in a voice of ice, "I suppose we might as well be going home."

This was the man she had given herself to! This was the man the very sound of whose voice had thrilled her with ecstasy; the man whose arms she had longed for, to be her strength and protection through the dark valleys!

They took their way down through the fields on the shadowed side of the hill. There was a creeping frostiness in the atmosphere that made her pull her sweater tight about her neck. There was nothing to say, and in mutual recognition of the fact they avoided the mockery of empty small talk, and walked in silence.

So they came to the border of the first field, where a thicket of alder and witch-hazel screened an an-

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cient stone wall. The alder thrust sturdily aloft, like tiny mailed fists, a thousand iron-black, rust-tipped cones. The witch-hazel hung out upon its slender branches a countless multitude of exiguous pale yellow bannerets, shyest yet hardiest blossomings of the annual pageant, shedding upon the November air a faint, arresting fragrance, once known, never to be mistaken. While winter even now jangles his icy manacles in the valley below, creeping stealthily, resistlessly to the hill-tops, bringing captivity and death, this debonair rearguard of the flown season flings undauntedly back her final challenge. "These lives shall yet be numbered for me," she cries; and still the white tyrant stays his work.

As the pungent fragrance of the mysterious flower struck upon her sense, Georgia caught her breath with an involuntary sob. This was among the dear delights they had projected — to stand together in the presence of the witch-hazel, to gather an armful of it for the beautification of the house.

Philip turned upon her a look of shy appeal, nursing in his bosom a quick, inarticulate hope that she would remember, and give a sign. But he saw no sign. With head thrown back and lips confidently set, she deliberately pressed ahead of him, parted the thicket with her hands, and leaped upon the stone wall, agile, assured, with the lithe grace of a chamois. His last hope had been slain.

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Two more fields, each with its bounding stone wall, and they gained the highway.

The dusk had fallen rapidly. They seemed to be the only two living beings abroad in all that melancholy land, so terribly alone together, and yet so many leagues asunder. Here and there a light, appearing in a farm-house window, bore witness to the homely cheer within.

This was Thanksgiving Day. The thought came to Georgia with a sudden, cruel poignancy. This was the ancestral feast, the feast of loyalty and gratitude. Every one else was rejoicing. They two only were outside, — outcast.

They reached the dismantled gates of Highstone and entered the dark avenue under the evergreens and locusts. Still not a word had been exchanged between them. At moments a grim humour in the situation came to her so forcibly that she could almost have burst into mirthless, sardonic laughter. But even the cynic in her could not quite laugh while the sting of anguish was still in this first intensity.

They came within sight of the house. A ruddy light shone through the windows of the library. Her father was there, doubtless, awaiting their return. A stern, bitter thankfulness rose up in her that she had not told him of her engagement. Ah, *this* was her Thanksgiving! She was not excluded from the feast after all! Whatever there was to be suffered, she was

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able to suffer alone and in secret. She remembered her father, wrestling with some nameless angel of despair in the solitude of night. The same blood ran in her veins. Her despair should be as nobly, as proudly entertained, as resolutely confined to her own bosom.

At the porch Philip turned to her with an air of studied indifference, and tried to say good-by. He failed dismally. He would not have recognized his own voice for its throaty dryness.

“Well, I suppose this is good-by,” were his words.

“Yes,” she answered, hardly, not offering her hand. “I suppose it is. I hope I shall never have to see you again.”

She mounted the steps with the leisurely, confident grace of a king’s daughter, and entered the house without turning her face.

XIII

FROM young Victor, Victorine and her sister-in-law, Jenny La Bergère, alias Shepherd (or, as Victorine stoutly maintained, Shepherdess), had received the present of two balcony tickets to the Hippodrome, for the afternoon after Thanksgiving. Victorine, who was rarely to be found outside her kitchen, was declaring that she did not see how she could possibly arrange to go to that place, leaving the old papa and the old maman all to themselves.

“What does my brother think, I wonder!” she demanded.—“That I have nothing to do but go running around after mermaids and trick horses and all those foolish things? If you will tell me how I can find time for that, I will be thankful.”

Although she did not deign to look up from the kitchen table which she was vigorously scrubbing with a pumice-stone, her challenge was presumably addressed to Jenny, who stood languidly in the doorway, dressed in a much-beruffled morning-wrapper, her red hair still in crimpers. The two old ones occupied their customary stations, the papa at one side of the range, his two gnarled hands resting on a stout cane, his head trembling slightly, as always, on its pipestem of a neck; the maman Susanne deep

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in her padded chair in the corner. The energetic scrape of the pumice-stone and the scrub-brush, ocular proof of her immense business, belonged properly to Victorine's sentence. The muscles stood out on her large arms; her face was red with exertion and defiance.

For an instant only she relaxed her labour, to rest her hands on her hips and accord a rapid, contemptuous scrutiny to Jenny's matutinal attire.

“For some people,” she announced, crisply, with a little snort, “who have nothing to do in the world but dress stylish and spend money, those Hippodromes may be all very well.”

Between the Shepherdess and the thrifty, indefatigable Victorine existed an ever-smouldering hostility which sometimes came near to flame. The two were well matched, however. If Victorine had her contemptuous little snort, Jenny had her supercilious little sniff, and used it with especial readiness because she knew that it was excessively well bred.

“Yes, my dear,” she added, with a smile of superior amusement. “I know just how hard it must be for you to get off. Perhaps after all it will not be worth the trouble. I hope you will feel perfectly free to give it up.”

Victorine gave her a crushing look. “Will you tell me,” she demanded, “you who know all about such things, if it would be good manners for me to give it up,

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when my poor brother has already bought the ticket for me?"

To give it up was indeed the last thought in Victorine's head. She was consumed with curiosity in regard to these wonderful soaring ladies, diving mermaids, and dancing flowers of which she had heard so often, and which Jenny authoritatively declared to be the swellest thing that had ever hit New York. But to make admission of that curiosity was by no means Victorine's way.

"Oh, for that matter," said Jenny, with mordant gentleness, "I'm sure Victor would n't mind if you returned the ticket, my dear, and spent the money for some useful thing. He is very sweet in those ways. Though I can't tell you how I'd hate to have to go without you."

Victorine clicked her teeth together, and seemed to speak without so much as opening her mouth. "At half-past one I shall be ready, *my dear*. Voilà!"

The scrubbing was resumed so vindictively that Jenny's final retort — if she made one: she probably did — was quite lost in the uproar. At last, however, the labour of cleanliness was completed, and a strange quiet supervened. Jenny had disappeared. Victorine's temper had evidently worked itself out.

Turning solicitously to her father from the sink, over which she had just replaced her housewife's battery, she inquired, —

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“You will be comfortable, mon père? Since it appears to be necessary for me to go to that Hippodrome of theirs, you promise that you will be good — très, très sage — that you will not go to the corner?”

The old man nodded with the most irreproachable docility.

“Oui, ma Torine,” he replied, reassuringly. “You may trust the old papa. He will not do anything.”

“Good,” she commented. “And is the little mother going to be sage, too? She will not get to coughing — no? — while her Torine is away?”

“Non, ma Torine,” came the thin, faithful response. “You may trust the old maman. She is going to be good, good.”

“Well, then,” said Mademoiselle, with a sigh of seeming reluctance, “well, then, I suppose it will be all right if I let them persuade me to go, since Victor wishes it.”

“Yes, indeed, ma Torine,” urged the old man. “You must go for Victor’ sake. We promise to be sage — eh, Susanne?”

“Victorine can trust the old ones,” agreed the Norman coiffe. “They are going to be sage, sage.”

Promptly therefore at the appointed moment, Mademoiselle was in readiness. She entered the kitchen magnificent, incredible, in a black suit that seemed on the point of bursting for the extreme snugness of its fit, and a broad hat towering with white plumes.

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The old man rubbed his hands together with paternal admiration.

"You are beautiful, my Victorine! Eh, Susanne, are not you proud to be the mother of our Torine there?"

"She could have five husbands any day if she wanted them," chimed in the little creature.

Victorine gave a smiling grunt, as she struggled with a refractory glove. "I know too much about husbands," she said.

"There is plenty time yet," put in the papa, knowingly. "But, however, you are going to enjoy yourself well this afternoon."

"Oh, as for that," conceded Victorine, doubtfully, "I do not care much about all those absurd things at the Hippodrome. But Victor will be pleased, I hope. I am doing it for him. — You may light the gas, father, at half-past four."

"Very well, my Torine. At half-past four. You can trust us to be sage."

In another minute the ancient pair heard the shutting of the front door. They were alone.

"Eh bien," observed old Victor, taking a little pinch of snuff. "The young people must have their good times, I suppose. One of these days the good times will come to an end. They will grow feeble and old and have to sit beside the stove all day."

"Yes, my Victor," sighed Susanne. "Life is not

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gay. For a little time there is singing and happiness; but not for long. Well, one must bear it with patience."

The papa Victor gave a rebellious rap of his cane. "But for all that," he remarked, "it seems to me that Torine is a little too severe with the old ones. Why does she refuse to let me get a little glass sometimes at the corner? Why, I say? — Even at my age I might have a little pleasure in that."

"For one thing, my Victor, she does not like to have you spend money."

"A little glass — that is only ten sous."

"Yes, my dear man, if it would only be one little glass. But always where there is one, there is two, sometimes three. That costs."

"Nevertheless, Torine is too severe," reiterated the papa Victor, in an injured voice. "She forget the days of the Café Antoine. She think she owe nothing to her poor old father."

Susanne, perceiving that nothing was to be gained by argument, only sighed a little ghost of a sigh, and continued her knitting.

"But an idea has come to me," pursued the octogenarian, darkly. "I am thinking about it since two days. Surely there can be no harm in amusing ourselves a little when they have gone off like that and left us all alone."

"If Torine would not object," put in Susanne, timidly.

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“Torine! Always Torine!” — He snapped his fingers contemptuously. “I am not afraid of Torine.”

The little woman drew a tremulous breath of admiration. “Ah, you never were a man for being afraid, my Victor.”

The old papa smiled complaisantly. “No,” he agreed. “I do not believe anybody ever accused the proprietor of the *Café Antoine* of being timid; and all Rouen knew the *Café Antoine*. — Besides, in her heart, Torine would be glad. She would only pretend to be angry.”

“What do you mean, *mon ami*?” inquired Susanne, scenting evil.

The old man gave a confident toss to his head. “She does not like to have him out there,” he said, with a gesture of a long bony finger toward the yard. “He will never fly, that is certain. His wing is not going to be strong again. He only eats and eats and grows fat, — oh, my Susanne, so fat! so fat! — a veritable marvel!”

He produced a curiously succulent sound between his scanty teeth. A first clear hint of the devilish design flashed into the old maman’s brain.

“The pigeon!” she gasped. “Oh, my friend, you would never dare!”

“No?” — The papa Victor drew himself up imperially. “Who says I would not dare? — Listen, my Susanne, do you remember the famous pigeon-pasties

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of the Café Antoine? Do you remember the universal admiration they evoked? Do you remember how Victor Napoléon La Bergère, who is now an old, old man, huddling by the stove with his cane, used to create them in that fine little cuisine behind the restaurant? Ah, those were the good days. There was glory then!"

"Glory! Ah, my man!" exclaimed Susanne, with an outburst of febrile enthusiasm. "In all Rouen one used to hear, 'Oh, the wonderful pâtés de pigeon of the Café Antoine! Oh, the lovely sauces of the Café Antoine! Oh, the fried potatoes, so delicate, so tender, of the Café Antoine!' No one talked in Rouen of anything else!"

A flush of new life had appeared in her sunken little cheeks. Her two hands, freely gesticulating, shook with excitement. The old Victor agreed with her, rapping his stick on the floor. And then a look of Machiavellian subtlety came into his glittering eyes.

"Attend, my wife," he whispered, significantly. "I know something about Victorine, and she suspects that I know it. — How did the dog of Monsieur Philippe run away yesterday? He did not get out on the street himself. Neither did the grocer boy let him out, as Torine declare. — *I know how he get out!*"

She gazed at him with eyes wide-set, comprehending, reasoning.

"Go, my Victor," she directed, with sudden reso-

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lution. "Take the pigeon. Yes, yes, why should we not amuse ourselves a little? We will tell Monsieur Philippe that it flew away while you were feeding it."

"That is what I am going to do," announced the hero of the *Café Antoine*. "We will have once more a little pâté — just me and you, hein? — Wait, I am going for him. Will you get ready the little black kettle, my dear? We will boil him for fifteen minute in water with a small little onion and some salt."

It was a labour of but a half hour to prepare *Columba* for the pot. Susanne sat close by during the entire process, proudly, eagerly watching, until the last joint had been separated by the old man's skilled fingers, and put over to seethe. Next the paste must be mixed, and sauce prepared. With excited, fevered devotion she responded to his every request, hovering about like a timid winter bird. She fetched flour and butter, fetched stock, whole cloves, mace, cayenne, bay leaves, and a precious dark little bottle of herb-extract that had come from *Rouen* twenty years ago; she buttered a tiny baking-dish, found a piece of brown paper to cover the pie, and stood with raised, tremulous hands beside the old Victor while the pâté was compounded. He was a general; she his devoted adjutant.

"Ah, my Victor, you are a marvel of men," she protested, while her sunken eyes glowed with adora-

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tion. "One would believe you were not a day older than thirty to see the address with which you work. It is the *Café Antoine* once more alive!"

The old man gave a deprecatory shrug. "Oh, this is nothing," he asserted, magnificently. "This is the simplest of all my creations. However, it *is* something, my friend, to be free once more. *Torine* will never remember that her father is an artist supreme. She believe he is the same as any old man."

"*Torine* forget the *Café Antoine*," put in *Susanne*, antiphonally.

"But it is going to be all different in the future," declared the *papa Victor*, defiantly. "After this I am going to have my own way whenever I want it. It will be, 'Torine, this!' — 'Torine, that!' She will soon learn that things have changed."

There were two bright red spots at his cheek-bones; his eyes flashed with authority; his voice had lost its old-time tremolo, and was once more that of a commander of men's stomachs. The years had rolled from him like magic. Even *Susanne* seemed a quarter-century younger.

"*Voilà!*!" he announced, grandly, as he put the last decorative touch to the crimped edge of the *pasty*. "*Voilà!* It is done! — Open the oven!"

The oven was opened. In went the masterpiece of the *Café Antoine*. Click shut the heavy door. The deed was accomplished. The inspiration had come

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to its fruition. The genius of the papa Victor, evoked from its long slumber, had been vindicated.

"And now, my man," said Susanne, with hectic briskness, "we will have a little wee rest for one minute in our chairs; and then we will gather up the cooking things and put them away. Later we will eat the pie."

"Yes," said the papa Victor. "A minute or two of rest; and then we will finish."

They resumed their accustomed places; and a silence fell upon the room, broken only by the ticking of the clock. The afternoon was slipping away. Already the basement kitchen had grown a little dusky. A great fatigue began to envelop the ex-proprietor of the Café Antoine. His limbs, that so short a time before had thrilled with imperial energy, felt like dead things. He wondered how he could ever get up from his chair again.

The fire began to glow with a ruddier gleam through the little chinks of the stove. The kettle hummed with a soft, insistent monotony. And still the clock ticked on. The shadows were ranked deep in the corners of the room. It was almost time to light the gas. The dishes and utensils were still lying in disorder on the table. The thought suddenly came to him that before very, very long Victorine would be coming home; and with the thought a pall of dread fell upon his spirit. Victorine would be oh, so angry!

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She would scold him. Perhaps she would refuse to give him his little glass cognac before he went to bed!

Oh, they must clear away the dishes at once. Victorine must not find things in disorder.

“Susanne,” he called feebly. “We have had our rest now, hein? We must be putting away the things.”

For the space of several seconds he waited for an answer. It was very dark in the corner where Susanne was sitting. He could not see her.

“Susanne,” he called again. “Do you hear? We must be putting away the things now.”

The reply came so faint as scarcely to be audible. “Yes, my friend. We must put away the things at once, — at once, — in just a little minute.”

But neither made any movement to get up. The room grew darker. It was night in the corners. Victorine’s white apron hanging on the back of the door looked like a ghostly visitant, come upon them unawares. The shadows were full of things that got on one’s nerves.

“Susanne,” he said, finally, in a strange, muffled voice that tried to be resolute. “It is time to light the gas now. We must be busying ourselves. The dishes must be washed and put away now.”

“Yes, my Victor,” came the response, scarcely louder than the whirr of an insect’s wing. “We must not sit here any longer like this. We have had our rest.”

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There was a little break in her words; while the clock ticked tyrannically.

"Ah, my friend," she concluded. "Life is very hard. It is not an easy thing for the poor old ones."

The room was all dark now, save for the mocking little chinks of the fire. The pâté was surely burned to a crisp. Even the kettle was beginning to boil away, as you could tell by its eager, hoarse song. Decidedly old age had once more claimed its victims.

The maman Susanne sat huddled among the cushions of her deep chair, gazing at nothing out of vague, frightened eyes. She began to feel cold. She knew that soon she would begin to cough. Ah, life was not gay at all, just now. She wished they would come and put her to bed. She was very tired.

"Why does not our Victorine come back?" she murmured, feebly, at last. "I am getting frightened, it is so dark. And I am very tired."

"Yes," came the papa's voice, quaveringly, through the darkness. "I wish she would come. I wish she would come and light the gas. I do not like to sit here so long, just us two, in the dark. It is not kind to leave the old ones so long without attention."

XIV

FRIDAY afternoon Philip appeared again at the office, considerably to the surprise of the head-draughtsman, who had not expected him until the following week. He took up his work directly and seemed at once to become completely absorbed in it, exchanging scarcely a word with any of the other men. Gradually, as he worked, the tumult that still remained in his mind from the previous afternoon subsided. Only a deep, sullen bitterness was left.

For a time Georgia's accusations had overwhelmed him. He had left Highstone under the crushing conviction that his hope of forgiveness had been only a final proof of his baseness. He had ridden aimlessly, blindly, for miles up and down the silent, night-shrouded country, dazed by the thought that he was now a branded outcast. Before that one judge whose judgment could turn the scales of his life, he had been arraigned and found guilty of a crime that could not be atoned for, the punishment of which was that he must always carry in his heart the memory of the thing he had lost.

Georgia had never seemed so wonderful to him as at that first moment when, in the recital of his confession, he had sensed, rather than seen, the wave of re-

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vulsion that swept through her whole being. He must have been dull not to have known earlier the irrevocability of his sin in her eyes. How could he have failed to know it, knowing her? In her soul there were no compromises. Lovely flower that she was of the rock-founded New England hills, there was in her nature also something of their unbroken sternness and strength. He had had the temerity to aspire to her; he had breathed her fragrance; he had worshipped her high beauty, her fineness of soul; but he had proved unworthy of the quest, and had been sent away into the outer darkness of his deserts.

Late in the evening he had stabled his horse and gone directly to his room, seeing no one. As an excuse for leaving by the first train the next morning, he had urged anxiety about his work. He did not care whether the excuse were lame or not. People could think what they chose. It was nothing to him any longer.

For one minute, on his way to the station, he had stopped in at Aunt Prue's. He could not have brought himself to go without a good-by to her.

“Why, Philip, dear, what has happened?” she asked, noting with quick concern the signs of unhappiness in his face.

“It's only a personal matter, aunt,” he had explained, hastily. “It concerns just two individuals.”

“Oh, I'm sorry!” she said, with a smile of tender comprehension.

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“Don’t feel sorry for *me!*” he broke out. “Everything is my fault. I’m going back now to work and try to forget.”

Stooping quickly, he had pressed her little hand to his lips. She saw that his mind was made up. She saw that he had nothing to tell her, and made no effort to detain him further.

But Philip was by nature too candid with himself to entertain for long any morbid conception of his own baseness. He had done wrong; but he had done his best to atone for it; and he could not believe that there was not a charity in the truest love which would have taken him back and put trust in him anew.

He did not blame Georgia. She had never been truer to herself than just in this. But he wished that she *could* have understood.

It came to him that the people who could understand were precisely the people who were weak like him. The strong ones, the free-minded ones, the stainless ones were removed by the very mettle of their natures from comprehending what the ferocity of temptation might be with another. Because temptation never came to them, or because, when it came, there was always at hand the force to overcome it, they could not see how another might struggle in the dark, weaken, loose his hold blindly, and be swept away.

On Mullin Street, where he arrived early in the evening, troubrous tidings awaited him. For one

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moment Victorine was a little disconcerted by his unexpected appearance. She had not looked for him until Sunday night. Her story was not quite on her tongue's end. But it came quickly.

"I am so sorry, *so* sorry," she declared with a look of solicitude such as he had never before seen in her face. "*Always* I tell that grocer boy to be sure he shut the gate carefully when he go out. But yesterday he forget; and a little later, when I notice it, the poor little dog is already run away. I do not see him again."

The papa Victor set down his empty little glass on the table with a sigh of regret. "Yes," he corroborated, earnestly. "It was that grocer boy. I see the dog run out. I call to him. But it is no use. He is gone. He is disappear some place. And for the pigeon, alas, my frien', he get out the box this morning while I feed him, and fly away."

Old Susanne, who had not yet been put to bed, was sipping a cup of hot tea in the depths of her chair. Her voice was fainter than usual; but she piped up loyally, —

"Fly, fly, fly, m'sieu!" She made a descriptive gesture with one hand. "I see him fly — dere — way above de roofs, m'sieu."

"No, my Susanne," corrected the papa Victor with extreme scrupulosity. "Not above the roofs. He could not fly so well as dat. His wing was not strong

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enough. First on the ground — so! Then a little higher; then a little higher — roun' and roun' — and then off t'rough de hair. I try to catch him; but it don't be no use."

"Yes, the poor old papa was quite exhausted by all that," said Victorine, with a confirmative nod. "When I come home I find him there in the chair. He can hardly speak for being tired. It is useless to try to catch a bird, monsieur, by running after it. The papa would have needed wings."

The compact of deception was complete. The armour of falsehood was impenetrable. Had it not been that Philip, stepping out into the extension basement to dispose of the relics of his hospital, perceived on the floor a few tell-tale feathers which had escaped the papa's sedulous notice, he would have had small enough ground for suspicion. As it was, he only smiled grimly, bit his lip, and went up to his room without further words.

The incident affected him so triflingly, one way or another, that he believed he must be growing callous. It only meant that he was a little more friendless than ever. There had been only one real incident in his life. He wondered whether anything would ever seem important to him beside that.

Entering his room, he dropped sullenly into a chair, without lighting the gas, and indulged himself for a little time without restraint in gloomy reflections.

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Three nights before, when he had last sat here, a taper of hope had still burned in the inmost recesses of his mind. That had been extinguished now. The gust that blew it out had gone by. Darkness and dull resentment were left.

“Is that you back again, Wetherell?” inquired a voice from the open doorway, and he recognized the glow of his neighbour’s stogie.

“It is,” he replied, springing up not without mortification, and striking a light.

“Well, well, what brought you back, pray, at this early date?”

Philip did not look at him directly, but reached for a cigarette. “Oh, I just thought I’d come,” he answered.

“Too much Thanksgiving, perhaps,” ventured his friend.

Philip nodded.

“It’s a pretty custom, that of giving thanks,” observed Barry dryly. “Charmingly pretty. The Big Bow-wow must be hugely gratified. What did you have to thank him for this time?”

“I was interrupted in the midst of the service,” answered the young man with a flippancy which did not conceal bitterness. “I’m afraid I neglected to resume it later.”

“It’s a very long service, if it’s put through consistently,” said Barry, spitting into the fire. “Thank him for flowers; thank him also for lice and scale and blight

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and slug. Thank him for the inestimable gift of health ; thank him equally for tuberculosis bacilli, hookworm, leprosy, and the rest. All these are showered upon us freely out of the cornucopia of the same Infinite Goodness. What I never could understand is why, if we appoint Thanksgiving Days, we don't also appoint Cursegiving Days to even up the balance. The logic of both would be the same."

He broke off with a mirthless chuckle, and there was a silence, while he took a few puffs at his cigar. Finally he turned an intent look upon the boy's countenance.

"Can you make terms," he asked, "with a world in which an all-wise, all-powerful Creator sends blight and pestilence upon the children of his creation?"

With a jarring start of surprise Philip remembered that only the day before, he had been listening to little Aunt Prudence in her garden. For an instant he saw her again, standing beside him in her absurd working-cap, her grey eyes lighted with happiness as she chatted of her bulbs and of the goodness of the natural order. Under Barry's immovable scrutiny, the vision vanished as suddenly as it had come.

"For myself, I don't see how," he admitted, honestly. "But I know some who do."

His visitor laughed. "I suppose they term pain and disease a mysterious discipline of Providence. That's the usual evasion."

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Philip did not answer. He wondered what little Aunt Prue would say about pain and disease.

“I knew a man once,” said Barry, “who replied, with a solemn shake of the head, when I put that query to him: ‘Ah, that’s the mystery of it all, my friend. That’s where we are called upon to have faith.’ — Faith! I thought that unsurpassable as a statement of the piddy widdy orthodox view. Shut your eyes to facts: *take faith!* For myself, I prefer to have facts, even though they may not be pretty.”

A feverish, bitter eloquence suddenly laid hold of the man. He rose from his chair, threw his cigar-stump into the fire, and paced up and down the room, forcefully gesticulating.

“Look abroad, with wide-open, seeing eyes on the kingdom of nature,” he cried, passionately, “and tell me what you discover. Teeth to tear, fangs to poison, hooks, tusks, to rend and gore, stings, claws, venom-pouches, suckers: — oh, yes, a thousand convincing evidences of God’s peace and good-will! Go to the Parasites, O true believer, consider their ways, and be wise. Acquaint thyself with all their diabolical machinery of destruction; survey those thousands of species utterly incapable of life save by sapping the life of another, — Ah, *Nature!* — What is Nature but conflict, pitiless, murderous, uncompromising, unremittent conflict, where one out of five, one out of ten, — yes, in lower species, one out of millions, —

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survives, and the rest feed the Cosmic Process. By all means, let us return thanks, thanks, for the ineffable beauties of Nature! Let us go humbly to Nature, and through Nature humbly to Nature's God!"

Philip shivered in spite of himself as he felt the man's burning eyes fixed upon him. Where had he seen those eyes before, that proud, backward fling of the head? With an uncanny shock of memory he placed it, and heard Georgia Raeburn saying again — "Not much like daddy in that, at all events." No, not much alike in the character of their faith; and yet how strangely akin by the fire and vehemence of their temper. Gerizim and Ebal, blessing and cursing, yet mountains of prophecy both.

"If that is your world," demanded Philip, intently, "what terms do you find for making your life worth living?"

"Terms? — My *will!* My *desire!*!" retorted Barry, throwing out his gaunt hands with an imperial gesture. "What more do I need than that to justify existence for me, individually? I see everything struggling for the thing it wants — food, light, pleasure, what not. It may get what it wants. It may lose it. While the chance of getting it remains, life means something, is desirable. Look at me! I've lost once, lost twice, lost thrice. I'm at the bottom of the ladder. But only three years ago I was climbing, climbing toward the top — I mean the top of my particular

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ladder. Well, I may get there yet. I have n't given up. So long as it has n't been proved to me that I can't get there, I have hope ; and so long as I have hope, I can accept life on its own harsh terms and be glad of it. If I win my victory in the end, I shall have the satisfaction of having won it over every obstacle that the world and the social order and my own recalcitrant instincts can have put in my path. If I lose — if the hope that now lights me fails and is extinguished — that is where I cease to struggle."

"If the hope that now lights me fails," — the words echoed through Philip's brain long after his guest had said good-night and withdrawn to his own room. It seemed to him that he had uttered them himself.

"If the hope fails, there I cease to struggle." He had nursed hope, the hope of being found worthy ; and the hope had failed. Other hopes remained, to be sure ; but that one which came closest of all to his heart was dead. The struggle which it had inspired, was there anything in him now to give it continuance, to make it worth while ?

Had not the prophet of the Mount of Cursing spoken truly ? The struggle ceases when the hope that lights the soul is extinguished.

XV

THEY sat at one of the little tables in the balcony at the Boulevard. Through the warm, smoke-wreathed atmosphere were borne the subdued strains of the orchestra below — some languorous waltz, that pulsed lulling on the senses, and seemed to absorb into itself and transmute into an original element of the music the chatter and laughter of the throng of diners and the ceaseless tinkling of glass and silver.

Leaning forward on her elbows and resting her chin on linked fingers, the woman gazed into his face through narrowed eyelids, and smiled a smile of the eternal Sphinx.

“Well?” she said.

There had come a slight pause in their talk. It was the first since they had met, in response to his note of invitation, at the restaurant. Till now Katrinka’s delightful, inconsequential chatter had left no spaces for reflection. There had been no explanations, no references even to the events of a fortnight previous. But at last the inevitable moment had come.

The narrowed, drawn-out eyelids flickered slightly over the liquid eyes of grey-gold; but the gaze of the eyes did not deviate. He felt an old Egyptian spell in them lay hold of him.

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“I was sure I would see you again,” she said.

There were both welcome and challenge in her infinitely flexible voice.

The man advanced his hand involuntarily to her empty glass and spun it toyingly in his fingers, while the colour mounted to his handsome face.

“In that case, you knew a lot more than I did,” he said, watching the rim of the glass intently. “I did n’t have any expectation of seeing you again. But I was a fool. I might have known better.”

He gazed at her directly, and the fires that are burned before strange gods were lighted in his dark eyes. “Who could keep away?”

She smiled again, with unparted lips, and tilted her small head a little more on her hands, so that the long, swan-like throat was strained to a new curve of beauty.

“But why did you want to keep away so, my Lippo?”

The man hesitated, seeking an answer in vain.

She dropped her hands to the table, and leaned forward on her elbows, opening her eyes wide, and speaking with a childish wistfulness.

“Did you think I was so very, very, *very* wicked that you must n’t come near me?”

For the merest instant the man let his strong hand close hard over one of hers, as it lay with relaxed fingers on the cloth.

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“There was a reason,” he brought out between lips almost shut. “It was a good reason too; but it doesn’t exist any more. Now it is for me to choose what I want.”

The woman had a thrill of exultation. He belonged to her now. He had tried to get away; but he had come back. It was a vindication of her power. And more than that; it was the fulfilment of her most cherished wish.

“Ah, my dear, what good, good times we are going to have together — *hé*? I am so happy. You make me glad I am alive.”

She gave him a shining look that caused the words of his reply to die on his lips. To be loved, to be coveted, to be petted and adored, and to offer all this in like measure to another, ah, was there not compensation here, after a sort, for what he had sacrificed? What signified any license he might give himself now? The lofty white summits to which he had not been able to attain no longer beckoned him. He no longer had a loyalty or a pledge to fight for. Nothing now was to hold him back. The struggle was over.

“You like the opera?” she asked. “Oh, I am glad! We will go often, often together — *hé*? I adore it, — not those dull German things. No, I swear to you I went sound asleep when I heard that old ‘Lohengrin.’ What a little simpleton was Elsa — *hé*? And the swan — oh, mein liebe Schwann!” — she rolled her eyes

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drolly — “the swan what creaked when it came in from the coulisses, — oh, I swear to you, my dear, I never will be so bored again till my dying. ‘Tannhaeuser’ was a little better. There was a pretty ballet in the first act — the mountain cavern, you remember? — where that lovely young knight was captivated by that fairy woman of the cavern. Fremstadt was the Venus the time I saw it. Oh, my dear, she was beautiful! — It was a nice story too, the story of the knight and the two women.”

Their eyes suddenly encountered with a shock; she read something in the man’s, and after a pregnant pause, bent toward him intently, with the question,

“Tell me, my Lippo, is there an Elizabeth, then, waiting somewhere for you?”

A slight shiver crossed his shoulders. “There was,” he muttered.

“But there is n’t now?”

She hung on the answer. He shook his head with a bitter smile.

Her voice softened strangely. “Oh, the women like Elizabeth, they do not ever understand how the world is made. Listen, my dear: you would have flung away your little fairy of the Venusberg for ever and ever and ever, would not you, if your Elizabeth had said, ‘Come back, my knight, — I forgive you.’ ”

Philip could not hide from her the tears that for an instant welled hotly into his eyes. The memory of

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what he had lost stabbed his soul with intolerable pain. Where was he now? To what had he come? — To this: a return to the thing that had cost him the other. An instinct of revulsion seized him, a wild impulse to leap up from the table and make his escape.

But the arresting thought was only a second behind. What he had lost was lost. He could not be again what he had been. There was no power now that could hold him from being what he was to be.

“I know it,” she declared. “You are that kind of a man.”

“What kind of a man?” he asked, dully, for his thoughts had swept him far away.

“There is something like rock inside you that is different from any one I have known: something strong, and which does not bend, and which — what am I going to say? — which does not give itself to pleasure — do you see? — no matter how much you may try.”

“Nonsense!” came the bitter retort.

“No, my dear, not nonsense. It is the trut’,” she protested. “You have a voice in there” — she struck her bosom — “that says ‘no’ — ‘no,’ always. That is why, for my part, I cannot help always being a little afraid of you. I have no conscience, me. I do what I like. I have no fights like that inside. You have great storms — hurricanes — there. I know. You had one

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just now. I could see it. And for one second — two seconds — you hated me, oh, so cruelly!"

"I don't hate you now," he broke out, in a hoarse whisper, leaning toward her.

She drew herself away with an enigmatic smile.

"You think you don't," she corrected, very calmly; "but that's only because you want me, my dear. Something in you hates me, and hates yourself for wanting me. I am just beginning to understand."

"Don't!" he cried, beseechingly. "What's the use of *understanding*?"

She paid no attention to his words. For the instant she was completely given to the truth that had flashed upon her.

"Some day," she said, quietly, in the same tone as before, "the Voice will take you away from me."

"Don't, Katrinka, don't!" he pleaded, in accents which she could no longer disregard. "Don't make me miserable! I came to you because I needed to be happy. I could not stand being so lonely and unhappy any longer. I swore to myself I would n't come back, — yes, even after I had lost everything else, I swore I would n't come back. I fought against it for nine days and nights. Then I could n't stand it any longer. I wrote you. Here we *are!*"

"Ah, Philip, dear," she murmured, "how lonely your little Trinka would have been if you had never, never come to her again!"

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"We are going to be happy," the man declared.

"Oh, yes," she repeated. "Happy!"

There was a second's silence, while the word, which had taken on an unintentional eloquence of its own, echoed itself harshly through both minds.

Driven by an indefinable fear, she made a desperate effort to get back on comfortable ground.

"Do you know 'Thaïs'? We will go to 'Thaïs,' Lippo; it is adorable. Massenet's music seems to me all colours — pale blue, red, purple! — and oh, that Renaud is superb; a giant, my dear, all artist, t'rough and t'rough. — And 'Pagliacci,' that is my favourite opera of all; it is so pathetic. — Oh, how many things there will be to do. We will have our nice drives in the Park — *he* — and always you shall take your lumps of sugar for the horses; that is such a cute little way of yours. And ever so many nice little dinners like this. I have plenty of money to spend, plenty, plenty; all I want. We can do anything we like."

She had managed to dispel the atmosphere of dread and gloom that had for a moment enveloped them. Philip became exuberantly cheerful, witty, responsive, full of laughter. The shadows had been driven back into the innermost places of his soul.

In the two months that followed they were much together.

The fascination of Katrinka never diminished. There seemed to be in her an almost miraculous power

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of metamorphosis. She was never twice the same being: now sophisticated, subtle, as a serpent of old Nile; now like a child in her freshness and simplicity; now a happy boy in her camaraderie, her droll faces, her delight in adventure; now — and in this guise, most of all, she could charm him to the brink of the abyss — an elusive wood-sprite, half hidden in the shadows of tall trees, and gazing at you out of shy, wondering, unhuman eyes that seemed to know all the mysteries of the happy, fabled life of dryad and faun which the clutter of our modern world has driven so far, so very far from us.

She could be difficult, too, querulous. Philip was captivated by her little fits of sulkiness, quick moods of jealousy, hours, or evenings, of frigidity — a frigidity which he could always tease or woo away, and which lent a new delightfulness to the shy, lovely abandon that came later. Her moods were strangely without taint of vulgarity or calculation. Nothing more sincere had ever come into her life than the unpremeditated and unreserved idolatry which Philip evoked. Her solicitude for his health, her sympathy for his artistic ambition, and her utter confidence in his success, were all very appealing to him. He told himself that he was glad he had returned to her. He reiterated to himself that he was happy.

What the inner effect of it all was on him, precisely what it meant to him as a living soul, it would be

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hard to determine. A man of coarser fibre, more of the brute type, would have accepted it merely as a transitory and trifling episode, would have derived what gratifications it offered while it lasted, and when the moment of inevitable break came, would have dismissed it promptly and without regret from his mind. You would have looked in vain for a scar.

But with a man of fine organization, taught to reverence ideals, taught to cherish the integrity of his own personality, no such radical departure as that adopted by Philip could fail to work some deep effect,—deep and very obscure. For in his professional work he was as assiduous and efficient as ever. Those who knew him only casually, his fellow-employés in the draughting-room, might have noticed even an increased sociability and self-confidence of manner. The great accuracy, rapidity, and distinction of his work had won him the respect of the entire force; and his readiness to accept criticism and to offer assistance only enhanced the esteem in which he was held.

His health too was excellent. His sleep was sound. His head was clear. The constant and wearing conflict between the hot blood of youth and the austere, repressive idealism that was his Puritan inheritance appeared to be at an end. Affairs were, so to speak, on a practical basis; and no one was the worse for it.

Yet for the seeming ease of his present circum-

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stances he was paying a price. He could not long blind himself to the fact. He had deliberately sent an old ideal to the gibbet; but he had not succeeded in slaying it. It writhed in the pangs of death. It would not die. Even if life should finally go out of it, it would continue to hang there in the wind of memory, a hideous mockery, spreading pestilence. To have known it once as a living, dynamic being, regnant in his bosom, binding his conduct to nobility and self-control; and to know that he had sacrificed it to covetousness and appetite, could never bring him anything but misery.

Ideals that we have worshipped and betrayed do not let us escape from them. They continue to judge us, to mete out condemnation. "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it," cried the great Mephistophilis, supremely tragic conception of the elder drama.

"Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,
Am not tormented with ten-thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?"

Philip's defection was not to Georgia now; it was to the thing that was best in himself. All day long, from week-end to week-end, he was obscurely conscious — sometimes actively, poignantly conscious — of the bitter fact. He flung himself into his work to stifle the discontent that never left him. He flung himself into pleasure to find forgetfulness. For a little time the

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voices of reproach would cease; but only for a little. He tossed to the watch-dog at the gate the familiar sops that men have tossed always since the day of Adam's fall: how barren and empty is the canting sound of them to an honest mind! Beggars they are, that wear on their breasts the placard — "Blind" — but that wink knowingly if you show them a coin.

When you are seeking to capture and stifle that most imperial of despots, Conscience, not reason, but all the false shadows of reason, — plausibility, adage, analogies, sophistry, — must be your allies. Let them invade the lofty hall of the mind; let them swarm upon the gaunt figure that sits yonder upon the dais; let them bind and trample it. So shall the revelry proceed. Lights, ho, music and wine! While we live, let us live. The banquet is waiting.

Thus is Conscience left alone in its dim hall, while, for a time, Instinct and Desire have their way. Yet always, above the blare, even, of the Bacchanalian laughter and the song, its stern monitory voice is heard. This is their condemnation, that they knew the light, but that they chose darkness rather than light.

The revelry is over. The torches burn sickly and pale in the white dawn. The drunken senses, stupefied for a time, awake with a start of horror and revulsion at the spectacle before them — the spilled wine, the shattered goblets, the withered garlands —

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and still, through the murky silence, sounds on the pitiless voice from the deserted upper hall, — “Now therefore if that light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.” — Save as ye may flee from the Palace of Consciousness itself, ye cannot flee beyond the reach of that voice of judgment.

XVI

COMING in from work one February afternoon shortly after five, Philip encountered an unexpected and embarrassing obstruction to his progress upstairs, — nothing less than the form of a woman, young, if he might infer, seated on the bottom step in an attitude of extreme woe. There was no sign of a head: only an enormous beaver hat that seemed to lie quite flatly on the knees. Somewhere, too, beneath that all-concealing disk, with its sable ribbon and large gilt buckle, hands were presumably to be found.

The brown, pleated skirt, not carefully prearranged for this particular scene, he judged, had been drawn up decidedly askew by the knees, and disclosed two feet in high-heeled, run-over Oxfords, turned in sharply one upon the other, and tightly pressed backward against the riser of the stair.

The figure gave no sign, made no movement, as he opened the door, but seemed to be so completely dedicated to Grief that not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could have haled it from its Slough of Despond. A gentle, rhythmical, rocking motion, and an occasional smothered snuffle were the only evidences, indeed, that it possessed life, and was not

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merely some ingenious counterfeit presentment of Melancholia, worthy of the Eden Musée.

Philip's hasty scrutiny of the huddled object left him in no little doubt as to its identity; but to his likeliest supposition it was none other than the young woman he had occasionally seen opening the mailbox of the New York Correspondence Institute of Auto-health. A great uncertainty as to his proper course of procedure came upon him. Should he intrude upon its woe with an apology, and a request to be allowed passage up the narrow stairs? Or should he boldly attempt to pick his way by, or over, the object, refraining from desecrating these doleful rites?

He was about to attempt the latter manœuvre when the thought came to him that — in a figurative sense — this might be a wanton passing by on the other side; that possibly it was high time for the offices of some Good Samaritan to be offered, pouring oil and balm upon a lacerated heart. The function of Good Samaritan did not much appeal to him, somehow, just at the present moment. He felt no strong natural aptitude for the rôle of comforter to an unknown young person of the opposite sex. But he knew that if he went up to his room, attempting nothing, his heart would smite him. The least he could do was to ascertain whether he could do anything.

Therefore he withdrew his foot from the stair, stood back two or three paces, and reluctantly and

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rather faintly cleared his throat. There was no response. He began to feel embarrassed and a little worried.

“Excuse me,” he said, finally, in the most deferential voice in the world. “But I wondered if there was anything — the matter.”

The figure rocked, snuffled, and was silent.

The young man felt himself seriously at a loss. The thought came to him that he might run downstairs and tell Victorine about it. But that seemed heartless. Or he might withdraw from the hall by the way he had come, take a little walk, and hope that when he should return, the obstruction would be gone. But that seemed evasive. He would make one more attempt.

He cleared his throat with somewhat more determination.

“You seem to be in trouble,” he said. “Is there anything I can do?”

Melancholia stirred; then slowly unfurled herself; the wide brim of the hat flopped backward; and there was revealed to him a small, homely, tear-soaked visage, across which the principal elements of what had once been a pompadour straggled in wild disarray.

There was a moment of silent mutual inspection, while the lady of the mail-box — for it was she — mopped her grief-furrowed cheeks. A final pair of

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snuffles joined the countless host that had already gone unrecorded into oblivion; and lastly came out the long-drawn, wailing announcement,—

“I-I-I’m fi-i-i-ired.”

Two ranks of tiny puckers drew the freckles of her small broad nose out of their usual pattern; and her mouth pulled itself into the most doleful of inverted crescents. Again came the fatal words, pregnant with despair, addressed not primarily to Philip, but to the unjust, pitiless, implacable, never-to-be-circumvented Universe.

“He-e-e’s fi-i-i-ired me.”

“Brute!” declared Philip, sturdily. Knowing nothing of the facts of the case, he naturally took up cudgels in behalf of the worsted party.

She looked at him skeptically through red eyes. “He ain’t a brute,” she responded. “*I-I-I’m a fool.*”

Another torrent seemed on the verge of bursting forth. Dismay filled his heart at the prospect. The floodgates must be held, somehow.

“You’re more of a fool to sit there like that,” he announced, rather severely. “You’re very likely to catch cold.”

“I don’t care if I do-o-o-o,” she wailed.

“Well, I care if you do, even if you don’t.” His tone was such as to command respect. “Come. Are you ready to go home? Some fresh air will do you good.”

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The girl surveyed herself for the first time, straightened her belt with unsteady fingers, reached up ruefully to her hat, and attempted to correct its rakish angle. But the ravages of her sorrow would not be so easily dispelled.

"It ain't no use," she moaned, finally. "I'm a perfect sight, and I know it."

"Have n't you got a mirror in there?" asked Philip, authoritatively, indicating the door of the New York Institute of Auto-health.

"He's locked the door on me and gone away. — Gee, my rat's most tumbled out! Ain't that the absolute limit?"

She gave him a look of vague despair. She seemed devoid of plan, resigned to staying there in the hallway, mourning, till Doomsday.

"Hold on," directed Philip. "Wait here a minute, and I'll run up and fetch you a glass. Do you want a comb, too?"

She gave him a look of submissive gratitude. He took the stairs three at a bound, and was back in twenty seconds with the proffered articles. She took the mirror obediently, and surveyed her swollen physiognomy. Dismay stared in her eyes.

"Oh, my!" was all she could say.

She drew the pins out of her hat, threw it down on the hall chair, and while Philip held the mirror for her, hastily combed out her straggling fringe of front

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hair, readjusted the rat, drew the fringe deftly over it, and tucked the ends snugly under the scanty knot of pale yellow.

“Gee!” she exclaimed, with another hopeless survey of herself in the glass. “Don’t it make your face look blotchy and awful to cry like that! I suppose I’d ought to have learnt better.”

“Could you use some talcum powder?” suggested Philip, deferentially. “I’m sorry I have n’t got such a thing as a puff.”

“Oh, a handkerchief ’ud do first-rate,” she replied.

He mounted the two flights again, and returned with new contributions.

“You’d better take this handkerchief,” he said, offering her a fresh one. “Yours is pretty much used up, I guess.”

She bestowed a dismal look on the damp wad in her hand, and accepted his offer. Again he held the mirror, while she shook out powder on the handkerchief and applied it with wholesale assiduity, turning her countenance critically this way and that.

“Well, that’s the best I c’n do,” she sighed, after a minute, lifting a dubious pasty-white glance upon him.

“Oh, that’ll go splendidly,” he said, with paternalistic encouragement.

A first wave of self-consciousness came over her. An anomalous expression, which might have been some poor relation of a smile, appeared on her lips.

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"Say, I hope nobody butts in on us here."

"Better now," was her cavalier's comment, "than five minutes ago."

"There's something in that," she remarked, replacing her hat with studied care.

"Now if I'd only brought my veil," she added, "I would n't mind so awful."

"You don't need to mind as it is," protested Philip, with well-meant gallantry. "You look first-rate."

"Oh, say!" she broke out, between teeth that held an enormous imitation-turquoise hatpin. "Is that what you call a compliment? Oh, I ain't much of a Venus de Milo even when I'm all there; but at least I don't look exactly like — like *this!*"

They could both laugh now; and the laugh completed the rout of the snuffles.

"Come along," said Philip, slipping the toilet articles into various pockets. "I'll walk a way with you, if you don't object. Which direction do you go?"

"Smilax Street. Way down th' other side o' Hudson. You don't need to come, too."

"Had you rather I did n't?" he asked.

"Gee, no! I'm tickled to death."

Stepping out into the nipping February evening, they made their way westward until they came to the great thoroughfare of the West Side, where the clang-ing of street-cars, the rumble of belated trucks, and

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the cries of the innumerable children playing jump-rope and hopscotch under the very feet of the hurrying throng, combined to produce that pleasant, pandemoniac din which is the breath of life to every true inhabitant of Manhattan. Philip heard his companion inhaling it with an eagerness that meant restored spirits; and they plunged merrily into the swirling human current.

On Hudson Street it is mostly a procession of the poor. Labourers and workmen, hands in pockets, shoulders hunched forward, shuffling dully homeward, with sullen, lack-lustre visage; work-worn women with burdens,—piles of clothing on their heads, or large baskets under their arms; young sales-girls, in twos and threes, chewing gum, and talking in loud, nasal voices above the roar of the street-traffic; little boys and girls, raggedly dressed, carrying pails of foaming beer to the tenement supper; newsies yelling at the top of their lungs, “Woild,—Joinal,—*One* cent!—Woild,—Joinal,—*One* cent!—Buy a poiper, mister?”—the whole teeming, squalid, flashy, humorous, pathetic life of the great West Side flows in ceaseless double tide through this broad, unlovely Way of Common Humanity, which has its origins amongst the gaunt warehouses and loft-buildings of the lower city and its termination at Fourteenth Street, where Christmas shopping may be done on the instalment plan, and where the tawdry splen-

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dours of Moving Picture Shows and Dime Vaudeville outstare criticism and admiration alike.

Ahead of the two pedestrians, far to the South, the fretted outlines of the lofty Singer tower suddenly flashed into view, a cage of light, pendent from the clouds, swung high above the dark roofs of the city.

“Gee, ain’t it grand?” broke out the girl. “New York for mine!”

She had scarcely spoken till then; she had appeared to her companion to be lost in some intent preoccupation of her own. But the realization had evidently come to her now that she owed some tribute of conversation to her new friend.

“I suppose you don’t know much about this part of the city,” she ventured.

“On the contrary,” responded Philip, “it’s one of my favourite streets — this and West Street. I almost always walk home by one of them from the office. You’re so likely to see something interesting: a nice fight, or a good game of hopscotch, or a funeral. And I love to watch the truck-horses, three abreast. If I were n’t working in an office, I think I’d rather drive a three-horse truck than do anything else I can think of.”

“Say, that’s terrible funny,” she observed, soberly. “I thought you was quite a swell, from the looks.”

Philip laughed. “It’s a pity to disappoint you so,” he said.

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"Oh, no," she hastened to explain. "I ain't disappointed at all. I meant one of these bone-fide swells that goes sportin' round in limousines. You do honestly look like one; but I'm right glad you ain't."

There was a little break, while they scuttled across Christopher Street between two trolley-cars.

"I might have known you was n't," was her next breathless contribution to the dialogue. "Because if you had been, you would n't have been so nice to me. Lots of fellers would 'a' died laughing."

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Philip. "You did n't look very funny."

She disregarded his observation. "I'm so terribly emotional," she elucidated, frankly. "It gets me into a heap o' trouble. My sister Queenie's a good deal that way, too, only not so much so. She's more the happy type. We get our temperaments from mother. She's sort of an invalid; at least she thinks she is. You know what I mean; I ain't saying anything against her; only you sort o' got to take her word for it. Gee! that's what makes it rough for me to go and lose my job just now. We ain't paid last month's rent yet."

"Don't you think perhaps they 'll take you back again?" suggested her companion, hopefully.

She gave a defiant toss to her head. "*Me* go back *there*? I swore up and down I'd never set foot again

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inside the cursèd door." There was a hint of melodrama in her accent.

"Why," said Philip, slightly bewildered. "I thought you said he fired you."

"He did fire me. He does every once in a while, because he knows I'll be sure to come back again; and he counts on my doin' better for a few weeks after that. But I won't go this time, and I told him so to his face. *Ugh!*" — She screwed up her face into a knot of disgust, and clenched her fists.

"You don't like it there, then?" pursued Philip.

"Oh, yes, I do, in a way. — I'd like it well enough if it was n't for Tibbs."

"Tibbs?" inquired her escort.

"Yes, Tibbs. Oh, say, don't you know Tibbs? Well, you certainly miss it, not knowing Tibbs!"

"Is he the tall man with the black beard?"

"He sure is, and don't you forget it. That's Tibbs all right. He makes life a veritable tormentation for me. If I go and make the least little bit of a mistake, say like sendin' off a letter in the wrong envelope, he goes and gets crazy mad about it. Oh, we have terrible scenes in there, I can tell you. I always get to bawling like Niagara Falls, he excites me so. I never could see that it made so much difference about the letters. It's all the same line of rot — about thinkin' harmony thoughts, you know; drawin' currents out o' the Infinite, and all that. But Tibbs says, 'It's the

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touch of personality that counts, Miss Muller.' Well, p'raps it does. I ain't got no natural aptitude at all for business."

"Your tastes lie elsewhere, I take it," remarked Philip, more amused than he thought quite justifiable in the girl's confessions.

"Yes, they certainly do," she replied, with a deep sigh. "But I ain't got the face for the stage. That's the place where emotional people get a fair show, you know. My sister Queenie's on the stage; she's got a job in the chorus of the 'Pink Butterfly.' But Lord, Queenie can do something with her face. She's pretty as a picture. But I ain't even got what you'd call a good foundation for a face. So what can I do?"

No helpful suggestion came at once into Philip's mind; and they had turned into the squalid dinginess of Smilax Street before she resumed.

"I kind of thought some of goin' into settlement work. But they say you got to have a terrible pull to get in: so I don't suppose there'd be any show for me."

She heaved another deep sigh. "Oh, well, Tibbs may win out again, for all I know. I'm in the man's clutches, as you might say, on account of the rent not bein' paid. Seems to me I'm fated to be Tibbs's slave, *struggle as I will.*"

They came to a halt outside a rather ramshackle-looking apartment house.

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"You'd better come up a little while," she said, turning to him with a frank smile of invitation. "You might find Queenie. All the fellers get stuck on her. And then there's ma. She's a terrible picnic if you happen to be in the right mood."

He hesitated, vaguely groping for an excuse.

"Oh, come on!" she urged. "Just a few minutes. I'm sure you got the time for it."

The earnestness of her request surprised him; and he followed her up three flights of dimly lighted stairs, odorous of the West Side.

"Look here," she remarked, softly, as they reached the second landing. "You ain't told me what your name is."

He gave it to her, and was informed in return that his companion's was Irene Muller.

"Don't tell ma," she cautioned, "how we got acquainted. She'd think I was fresh to beat the band. And say, don't let on I'm fired, either. I suppose I'll be goin' back to-morrow."

XVII

A MIDDLE-AGED woman in a much-belaced tea-gown, which looked frayed and soiled even under the gaslight, rose from a sofa as they entered, and laying by a well-thumbed paper-covered volume, greeted the girl with languid effusion.

“Home again, Irene! — You are late to-night. The time has seemed long.”

She placed a lingering kiss upon the girl’s brow, and looked down into her face with fond yearning. Philip felt as if he were in a Third-Avenue Theatre, witnessing the entrance of the heroine. Such a touching demonstration of maternal affection would not have gone unrewarded there. As it was, he thought he detected in Irene a certain restiveness under the protracted embrace — or was it only self-consciousness at being observed by a young man?

“Yes, ma, dear,” she replied, as soon as release was granted. “I could n’t help it. There was a lot of letters to finish up.”

“You look white and tired, my dear,” said the mother. “Are you ill?”

The girl had a rather wry smile. “No, I’m fine,” she answered.

“Good! — And whom,” went on the mother,

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seeming to catch sight of the stranger for the first time, "whom have you brought with you, little girl?"

"Why, this is Mr. Wetherell, ma," responded Irene, promptly. "Don't you remember Mr. Wetherell? He was in my class to the Commercial College, you know."

The invalid had an air of searching through the recesses of memory; then a gracious smile dawned in her face. "Ah, to be sure!" she said. "That explains the haunting familiarity of his features. They seemed to cry out to me when he first entered. Wetherell, of course. Now I recall perfectly. It is a pleasure to welcome you once more, Mr. Wetherell, into our little home."

"I was sure you'd like to have a little chat with him," explained Irene, solicitously. "So I persuaded him to come up. I met him to-day just by accident. Were n't you just awfully surprised, Mr. Wetherell, when you saw me?"

"On my word, I hardly knew whether it was you or not," declared Philip, truthfully, wondering upon what seas of subterfuge he had unintentionally embarked.

"Ah, what a mystery it all is!" exclaimed Mrs. Muller, with affecting eloquence. "What a mystery! To think that you two young creatures, after all these months — so many months! — of separation, should again be brought face to face; again exchange greet-

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ings; again share in each other's lives. — Chance! — *Chance!* — Is *this* Chance?"

Rendered vaguely uncomfortable by so inspired a demand, Philip could find no more appropriate rejoinder than to admit that it was indeed very strange.

"Ships that pass in the night," sighed his hostess, "and signal each other in passing! How often life proves the poet's words to be true."

She disposed herself once more, in an attitude of beautiful languor, amongst the sofa-pillows, and drew a faded afghan over her feet.

"My little Reny has doubtless explained to you," she murmured, "that I am one of the Shut-Ins. The same old story: nerves! — You were very, very kind to give us this little visit."

Before Philip could reply, the door behind him opened, and a young woman of prodigiously modish appearance made a brisk entrance.

"Ah, it is our Queenie," came from the statuesque figure on the sofa. "Dear, you will excuse me this once for not rising. The mother is tired to-night."

"Sure, ma, that's all right," responded the newcomer, in a business-like tone, throwing off her furs, negligently, and struggling with the knot of a wondrously dotted veil. — "Hello, sis! Say, who's the sport?"

"Irene has brought us one of her old college cronies for a little visit," explained Mrs. Muller. "Mr.

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Wetherell, this is my other little girl, Queenie. You may not remember her, so great have been the changes of two years."

Philip saw a rapid look of intelligence flash between the sisters; and the question that was on the younger's lips remained unspoken.

"How de do!" said Queenie, offhandedly. — "Say, sis, give me some help, will you, with this lid. It's caught in my net, somehow."

While the two girls were busy over the intricate manœuvre, Mrs. Muller beckoned Philip to her side.

"What a picture of youth and health and innocence they present!" she whispered. "Have I not reason to be proud of my little brood?"

Philip could but be aware that he was being minutely studied by Queenie, and when, for an instant, he returned her gaze, she made a quick, teasing little pout, intended to convey to him that he need not have looked at her; but that if he would look at her, despite all she could do, why, she supposed she must submit. Queenie was evidently accustomed to being looked at, despite all she could do.

Mrs. Muller bent on him a smile that glistened with maternal fondness.

"So alike," she murmured, "and yet so different. One so airy, so joyous, so thoughtless. I call Queenie my little sunbeam. The other like an April day, — moods, all moods! — changeful, restless, yet withal

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such a sturdy, brave little being. I call Irene my little staff. — Ah, how can I ever express to any one, dear friend, what my two little girls have meant and do mean to their mother!"

She dashed a quick shower of happy tears from her eyes. "You will excuse a mother for being perhaps too fond," she apologized, impulsively. "The tears will not be held back."

Philip perceived that any embarrassment on his part was quite uncalled for. The shower was a feature of the play. He found it hard not to smile as he recalled what Irene had said to him of her maternal heritage of emotion.

"A young man may well be proud," went on Mrs. Muller, regaining her self-possession with a noticeably painful effort, "to have my little Reny for a friend. Some day she should make the right man very, very happy, — don't you think so?"

Her auditor squirmed inwardly, but conceded the expected smile of acquiescence. "Yes, very happy," he murmured.

By this time, the hat having been disengaged, it was permitted him to admire the startling edifice of golden puffs which had been concealed beneath it as fritters under a dish-cover.

"Got anything to eat, ma?" inquired Queenie. "I sure am hungry."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, so sorry, my dear," replied the

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lady on the sofa, pressing the back of a hand wanly to one temple. "But this has been one of my days. All jangled, girlie, all jangled, like an instrument out of tune. I can't describe it. I've scarcely left the sofa since breakfast. I thought maybe you and little Reny would n't mind scratching together something to-night."

From the utterly matter-of-fact fashion in which this announcement was received by the girls, Philip concluded that it was not an unprecedented household situation.

"Oh, that's all right, ma," said Queenie. "But we'd better be gettin' a move on. I got to be to the theatre early to-night."

"Mr. Wetherell," put in the mother, "you will not deny us the pleasure of your company at our simple home supper? My little girls will be delighted."

"Oh, I'm afraid I'd be in the way," said the visitor.

"Not at all," protested Irene. "We'll make you useful. We'll send you down to the delicatessen shop for some things, — eh, Queenie?"

"Sure, let him stay," agreed that young woman, with a careless little toss of the head, which implied to the visitor that she did not care a rap whether he stayed or went, *even though* he was so persistent in looking at her. "Though for that matter," she went on, "he won't get a very swell layout. — You see,

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Mr. Wetherell, as I'm on the stage, we never have anything very hearty at night."

The two sisters retired to investigate the larder, and Philip was left, for a short time, alone with Mrs. Muller.

"These strange nervous times of mine," she began, confidentially, with a reviving sniff at a tarnished vinaigrette. "The doctors are completely baffled. They tell me some of the symptoms may pass off; but I can see from the way they say it they scarcely expect a change for the better."

She dropped her voice. "The heart is affected, too." She pressed one hand to it. "To-day it has fluttered like a frightened bird from the moment I awoke this morning. But I would not have my little girls know it for worlds."

"I will not tell them," promised Philip.

"Ah, that is good of you! They idolize their mother," she murmured; and once more resorted to her handkerchief.

Philip suspected that he was called on to exclaim, "No wonder!" but he could not quite bring himself to it.

"I am a very faulty mother to them," she confessed. "I fall short of my ideal in a thousand ways. And yet, Mr. Wetherell, our home life is beautiful beyond words. You have had a little glimpse of it already. You shall see more. I cannot bear to think that some

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day it must be broken in upon ; but of course changes must come, sooner or later, in this mysterious world of ours."

There was a pregnant silence, while Philip listened enviously to the chatter of the girls in the kitchen, wondering how long it would be before they returned.

"I suppose it would be vain to deny," said Mrs. Muller, "that Queenie is the superior in looks; but am I wrong, Mr. Wetherell, in claiming that my little Irene has one of the most charming, interesting, unusual personalities in the world? You, who know her so well, will agree with me, I am sure. She is all emotion. — But hush, I hear her coming!"

She put two fingers with a theatrical gesture to her lips, and murmured, "The rest another time," as Irene entered.

"Well, well, I guess it's time I came," said the girl, "if that's what you're up to. — Come, Mr. Wetherell, I'm going with you. I'm afraid you could n't choose things right."

He followed her with relief; and they scampered down the stairs to the street. There she turned shortly upon him.

"Look here," she said. "Do you think this is just an awful joke I'm putting up on you?"

"If it is," he replied, laughing, "I'm getting my share of fun out of it."

"Well, it is n't a joke," she said. "We're kind of a

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joke — as a family, I mean ; but that's not the point. I've got a queer proposition to make to you. Are you game?"

"If it 's anything in my line," answered her companion, promptly, unable to make the least conjecture as to what was coming.

"Well, listen then," she began, seizing his arm familiarly, both to dispel her embarrassment and to get closer to his ear. "You know the way you treated me this afternoon? Well, that made an awful deep impression on me. I've been thinkin' about it ever since. I said to myself, 'That man must be on the dead level, or he would n't have gone and took all that trouble for a perfect fright of a girl like you. It was just because he was kind-hearted that he done that,' I said to myself. And I felt sure that if I told you about somebody who was awfully up against it, you'd be willin' to do what you could to help. Ain't I right, Mr. Wetherell?"

There was a pleading, tremulous earnestness in her tone that went straight to the man's heart. He would not have been himself if he had not said what he did.

"Of course I would," he answered.

She gave a grateful pinch to his arm. "I knew it," she cried. "Oh, I just knew it!"

There was a little pause, while she sought words to go on. It evidently was not easy, the thing she had to say.

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“It’s me that’s in trouble, Mr. Wetherell.”

“About Tibbs?” he asked.

“Tibbs! Oh, say, Tibbs is a joke. That don’t worry me at all. That was only one of my emotional fits. What I mean is something dead serious, Mr. Wetherell. You won’t mind if I’m awful frank, will you?”

He reassured her.

“Well, you must have seen already what an awful fool ma is. You don’t need to tell me so; because I know it. Well, you don’t know much about Queenie; but she takes after ma something surprising. She’s only a kid, you know; and about the limit when it comes to common sense. She’s pretty interested in her job, and I think she’s goin’ to get on all right with it. But that’s not everything — gettin’ on — is it, Mr. Wetherell?”

She turned her homely little face up to him, urgently, in the hope that he would be quick to understand her drift. Yes, he did understand. She plunged at once into the heart of her problem.

“You know it’s different, Mr. Wetherell, when it’s your own sister. I see other girls make fools of themselves, and I don’t seem to care very much; but Queenie’s different. I sort of feel as if she belonged to me, you know, she’s such a kid, and I’ve had to look out for her so much, myself, what with mother being the way she is, and all.”

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Philip looked down at his companion, certainly less than twenty, still, herself; and a stanch, motherly quality in her that he had not felt before struck him with peculiar emphasis.

"Queenie's nice inside, you know, Mr. Wetherell. She's only silly. She's the kind that ought to keep straight and marry a nice man some day. Gee! I think it would kill me, I do honestly, if little Queenie went wrong."

"Is there danger of it?" Philip asked.

The girl nodded, dully, and kept her eyes straight ahead of her, while she went on in a strained voice,

"Queenie's got the idea that she can't get on, unless she does like the rest — you know what I mean. Say, is that true, Mr. Wetherell?"

Again she looked up at him pleadingly from under her flopping beaver-brim, and her clasp on his arm tightened.

"It can't be," he answered. "I'm sure it can't be."

The clasp relaxed, and he heard a sigh of reassurance.

"But that's her idea," said Irene. "And there's a man who's after her, and he's bound to get her. He's got money to burn, and he'll give her all the automobile rides she'll stand for, and supper after the show, and buy her anything she wants. Oh, Mr. Wetherell, ain't there any way of keepin' her back? Are n't you goin' to try to help me? I know I'm fresh

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as the dickens to ask you ; but honestly, I don't know who to go to if you turn me down."

The man gave her a dubious look. "But do you think I could have any influence?" he asked.

"That's just it," she rejoined, eagerly. "Oh, I'm sure you could. You've made quite a hit with her already. She just says to me out there in the kitchen,—

"'Say, Reny,' says she, 'there's something you can always tell a real gentleman by, ain't they?'

"'Why,' says I, 'what do you mean?'

"'Did you notice,' says she, 'the way your friend behaves so nice to ma? — He's the real cultured thing, he is.'

"Say, Mr. Wetherell, that ain't bad, is it, for seventeen? She's there, all right, Queenie is, when she wants to be."

They arrived at the delicatessen shop, and it was not till several minutes later that Reny had a chance to return to the subject. Meanwhile her companion was making a rapid mental review of her proposal.

He saw himself placed in a dilemma. If he refused to put at her disposition what assistance he might — conceivably — have to offer, if he turned his back on her plea, he would be doing violence to the thing in himself that was most truly and deeply himself. Certainly it was audacious of her to address herself thus to a comparative stranger in so highly personal a difficulty; yet her very audacity, her tremulous as-

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surance that he would not refuse her nor misunderstand her, touched all the chivalry of his nature. How could he refuse?

On the other hand, if he accepted, and earnestly undertook to do something that would help Queenie hold her own, how anomalous, how absurd, how impossible, was the moral situation in which he would be placed. Having adopted a compromise in his own plan of life, he would yet be posing as a preacher and exemplar of social morality. To pretend to be what he was not was again to violate one of the deepest qualities of his nature.

Yet in all his life he had not wilfully left helpless any creature that had appealed to his impulses of protection. And it occurred to him now that some way might still be found of reconciling what at first blush appeared to be irreconcilable demands. At all events, he would — must — go ahead, and the situation could be left to work itself out as it would.

He accepted from Irene a large paper bag, in which the red-faced German behind the counter had skilfully stowed away an assortment of comestibles, — calf's tongue, potato salad, cheese, bread, and jam, — and the two left the shop. At once the girl turned to him with a look of hungry question. She knew from his silence that he had been thinking.

“Well?” she asked.

For a moment he did not answer. She clutched

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his sleeve, and peered into his face, with an expression of fright and despair.

“You ain’t goin’ to throw me down, Mr. Wetherell?”

“I have n’t any right to believe there’s anything I can do,” replied Philip, gravely. “But I promise you I’ll do the best I can.”

Her homely features grew almost beautiful for the radiance of gratitude that illumined them.

“Oh!” she broke out, “that’s fine! I’m tickled to pieces! I was sure you would n’t leave me in the lurch.”

He asked her what she proposed doing.

“The thing is, Mr. Wetherell, she picks up ideas terrible quick. She wants to be exactly like other people. Just now she’s got the idea that all men are alike, you know, and that it don’t pay to hold on. Now I think all she needs is for a nice, refined man, a man who’s all on the level, to be a friend to her. You’ve no idea what a lot o’ influence you can have.”

Recalling what he had seen of Queenie’s behaviour, Philip could but entertain his doubts of the efficacy of Irene’s prescription. But he held his peace, and showed himself amenable to her eager proposals.

Before they reached home, she had suggested to him that he should see the kid to the theatre that evening, and make a date with her for some Sunday afternoon in the near future.

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“Just you two, you know,” she explained, simply. “She’ll have a better time than if any one else was along. And she’ll feel sort o’ flattered because you took her, don’t you know, and I stayed to home.”

Philip would have protested; but she headed him off.

“This ain’t no tea-party, Mr. Wetherell. It’s business for both of us; and you an’ me are goin’ to work it for all that’s there.”

XVIII

DESPITE the grotesque absurdities of her get-up, Queenie Muller was undeniably a beauty. Her features were small, and as faultlessly regular as those of a wax-model. Her complexion, still unravaged by the cosmetics of the theatre, had the satiny freshness of a flower. Her eyes had a way of opening very wide, with a beguiling expression of wonder and innocence; and when she smiled, a double row of pearly white teeth, like the milk-teeth of a child, peeped into view.

A hundred times on the course of their journey to the theatre Philip found himself wondering that she should even have reached the age of seventeen without having accepted the bait which the city so cunningly and so pertinaciously offers to youthful beauty. Her eyes were never for a moment quiet, but wandered curiously up and down the car, casting conscious, demure glances at the various men ranged opposite; and if a glance were returned, she would drop them at once, with a look of modest denial, to the floor, while two little white teeth were set reprovingly upon her under lip. She had a trick, too, of advancing her tiny feet, in their impossibly high-heeled shoes and yellow-clocked hose, inch by inch into the aisle; then,

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as if suddenly becoming aware of their conspicuousness, drawing them quickly back, and making a manifest effort to cover them from view with her much-abbreviated walking skirt. If ever a moth played with flame, 't was Queenie.

Yet she clearly was gratified by his company; and when he suggested that they take a little jaunt together on Sunday, she gave vent to an exclamation of spontaneous delight that surprised him.

"Just you an' me? Do you mean that, Mr. Wetherell?" she added, as a doubt arrested her enthusiasm.

"That's what I meant," he replied. "Would you rather have some one else along?"

He hated the necessity that made him seem to slight the lonely sister at home; but this was according to the prescription; and the prescription was to be given a fair trial.

"Oh, no! Just ourselves!" He could read the flattered comment she was inwardly making. "It will be perfectly bully!"

Bidding her *au revoir* at the stage door, Philip set out afoot upon his homeward way, so deeply immersed in depressing reflections that he scarcely gave any notice to the gay throngs which were beginning already to flock into the garish parade of Broadway.

Foolish and empty-headed as she was, Queenie's youth and her defencelessness had profoundly touched him. How hungry for her was the pitiless,

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careless city; how eager to fling her upon the insatiable altars of Pleasure, a victim of those barbarous rites that accept no other sacrifice than quivering human hearts. This was civilization, reflected Philip: a figure that lifted on high the cross and the lamp, while under its feet it trod to death its own offspring.

Had humanity no palace in which some remote apartment was not dedicated to the four-footed Minotaur of appetite? Even now, in dark side streets, in poverty-stricken tenements and murky dance-halls, the hostage of youth and ignorance was being drafted for him.

He remembered what Barry had said of the talon, the tusk, and the fang. Was it, after all, the same here as in the dank corridors of the jungle,— inexorable instincts, hunger, lust, destruction, wreaking their will upon the weak? To attempt to hold them back from their chosen prey — was it not as vain as to attempt to thwart the law of gravitation? The predatory instinct was a fact of nature.

Perhaps. And yet — how the heart cried out in protest! If at one moment Philip could say to himself that the lamb frisking gayly down the jungle path was sure to be pounced upon, sooner or later, by the wolf in waiting, — such was the inalterable mandate of the Social Order, — at the next, he must remember with a pang the white, stricken, pleading face of

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Queenie's youthful protector, as she had looked up at him with the words, —

“It makes a difference, don't it, Mr. Wetherell, when it's your own sister?”

No thought of the ultimate wisdom or folly of his enterprise really concerned him, or could affect the spirit of his endeavour. He had given his promise to Irene. He had seen for himself, only too well, the danger in which Queenie was placed, and which she aggravated by every possible effort of her own. And he was going to do what he could, — what though failure might be the issue?

Arrived at his lodgings, he lighted his pipe, and settled himself for an evening of study, partly to ease his mind of its burden of conflicting thoughts, partly in pursuance of a carefully chosen programme of home reading. His bank design had won a mention in the competition, and the fact had given him an additional impetus to master, in so far as he could, the secular architecture of Renaissance Italy. He longed to imbue himself with the spirit, so robust, yet so delicate, of those Italian builders; to see life, in some measure, with their enamoured eyes. Just now he was deep in a second volume of critical studies of the palaces of Florence.

Scarcely, however, had he turned the second page in his evening's reading, when there was a knock at the door, and his fellow-lodger entered.

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“Working?” asked Barry.

It was perfectly evident that Philip was working. Under ordinary circumstances Barry would have been prompt to apologize for the interruption, and to withdraw. But the tone of his question betrayed, to the young man’s mind, the hope of a negative answer.

“No,” he replied. “Just fooling a little with the same old picture-book.”

He flopped the volume shut, left his chair, and took a favourite attitude of his when in talk — standing with his back to the stove, legs apart, hands joined behind him.

An odd sort of non-committal intimacy had grown up between the two men in the past months. Each knew the quality of the other’s mind with surprising fulness; yet there had been from the first a complete reticence as regards matters distinctively personal in nature. Philip knew no more now than he had at the end of the first week of their acquaintance what his neighbour’s story might be — whence he came, what he was doing, and what was the tragic burden that so often visibly excoriated his spirit, bringing the sardonic, contemptuous challenge into his cavernous eyes. In return, too sensitive to force an intimacy where it was not mutually desired, the young man had entertained an equal reticence in regard to himself. He sometimes wondered whether this detached, guardedly partial fellowship — a fellowship purely of

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mind, it seemed to him — had enough warmth in it to deserve the title of friendship. He could not help being a little resentful, indeed, of Barry's unimpeachable reserve. More than once he had seemed to be conscious of a contrary impulse straining at the leash; but if such were the case, the impulse had till now always been sternly repressed. Passionately vehement, often, in thought and behaviour, his neighbour had yet kept himself arrogantly aloof in every personal interest. His passion appeared to spend itself exclusively upon ideas.

But to-night, for the first time, Philip detected a quite different quality in the man's voice. A second glance at him discovered a haggard, nervously distraught expression of countenance that made him wonder if he were ill.

"I can't work," said Barry, curtly. "I can't read. I can't sleep. I can't loaf. Don't you want to amuse me?"

The forced flippancy of his visitor's manner was jarringly out of accord with the intense earnestness of his accents.

"I don't know that I'm well qualified for court entertainer," rejoined Philip. "What do you want me to do?"

"D' you play poker?" asked Barry.

"Sure. — Want a game?"

"Good!" said Barry, twisting his stogie nervously

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between his thin lips. "Will you come into my shebang?"

Philip followed him into the front apartment, whose severely bare walls and sparsity of furniture would have befitted the abode of an anchorite. A single shelf of biological pamphlets and reference works; a wall case containing microscopic apparatus and supplies; and the large, bare work-table, on one end of which lay a heap of portfolios and some drawing materials, constituted sufficient evidence of the tenant's avocation. The bareness of the room was unrelieved by any disguising touch. A pair of wrinkled congress boots stood beside the bed; a time-yellowed overcoat and a slouch hat were thrown negligently across its footboard; and over the back of a chair, in a far corner of the room, dangled several nondescript articles of underclothing. The appearance of the counterpane indicated that the occupant of the room had been lying there with his shoes on.

Philip detected a strong odour of coffee in the air, and noticed a tin pot still steaming on the little gas-stove that stood on a chair by the washstand. An unwashed cup had been set down on the bureau.

He could not account for it to himself; but he had the sudden impression of entering a chamber of torture: a place where the soul of a man had been drawn on the rack.

Barry jerked open a drawer, and flung things

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about this way and that in his search for cards and chips.

"I must have them somewhere," he declared, harshly; then stopped and shoved his hand through his unkempt hair. "I believe I have n't, after all," he said. "Here 's some chessmen; but, hang it all, I don't feel like chess, do you?"

Philip fetched the requisites for the desired game from his own room, and they sat down to play. For the next half hour the only sounds to be heard in the apartment were the whirr and snap of the cards as they were shuffled, cut, and dealt, the click of the chips, and the terse, stereotyped phrases of the game: — "How many?" — "See you!" — "Take it," — "Your deal," — and the rest.

Barry devoted himself to the business in hand with a stern, unremitting intentness that was as far as possible, apparently, from enjoyment. The veins stood out on his temples in blue ridges; his hands trembled as he took up or threw down his cards; and whether he won or lost, the fixed, white set of his lips on his cigar never relaxed, save as he occasionally removed it an instant to cough or to spit out a chewed shred of tobacco. There was an electrical tension in the atmosphere, as if something startling might be expected to happen at any moment. Philip felt himself becoming keyed up to an intolerable pitch of excitement, he could not have told why.

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Suddenly, without a word of warning, Barry flung down his cards and jumped to his feet.

"I can't do this any more," he announced. "That ends it for to-night. Do you want some coffee?"

He lighted the gas-stove; and while the beverage was heating again, he paced up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets.

"What are we going to do next?" he demanded, roughly.

"How about a little walk?" suggested Philip, feeling an extreme hunger for fresh air and open sky.

His companion flashed him a penetrating look. "Did you say you wanted to go to walk?" he asked.

"Not unless you feel inclined."

"Will you stay with me till we get back home?"

"Certainly I will," answered the other, in some surprise.

"Let's go. — Here, — there's your coffee."

He filled the cup with a steaming black fluid and offered it to his guest. Philip declined. Barry gulped it down with avidity; filled and emptied a second time, and replaced the cup on the washstand. The boy heard it rattle on the marble slab, and knew how unsteady must be the hand that held it. An instant later the two sallied forth.

Barry gripped his companion's arm almost savagely. They turned down toward the North River docks.

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The night was nipping cold. West Street was well-nigh deserted. A great assemblage of drays and market-trucks, untackled for the night, and covered, many of them, with sheets of canvas, filled the middle of the wide thoroughfare. Innumerable ranks of barrels, stacks of crates, pyramids of baled hay, were ranged along the pier fronts, casting odd shadows under the hissing arc lights. Against a luminous sky the wide steamship piers cut sharp, blocky outlines; and here and there, above the pattern, the funnel of some ocean greyhound threw out a short, black spoke. Overhead a multitude of stars kept watch.

The two men walked rapidly, almost without speech, for a long time; and as they walked, Philip, his arm closely locked by the older man's, grew aware that the crushing weight of the other's tragedy was slowly transfusing itself over his spirit. Whatever it was, it was terrible. The consuming presence of it appalled him; and yet he felt a secret, thrilling delight in the consciousness that somehow or other a barrier that had separated them was being demolished; that after this, the old impersonal reticence, which he had found so uncongenial, could never again be what it had been. Their relationship was altering from minute to minute. He had a premonition that he was on the brink of some momentous revelation.

It came sooner than he expected, even. His companion suddenly flung the butt of his cigar into the

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gutter, and broke out in a voice of despair that could be no longer suppressed.

“Oh! How I hate it! How I despise it all!”

“What?” said Philip.

“Life! Death in life! The curse of it! What right has life to put shackles on me? What right? Have n’t I my claim to freedom like another? Why should a past, for which I am in no way responsible, hold me with unbreakable fetters?”

Philip had no answer to make; and they pursued their way with unrelaxed speed down the deserted thoroughfare. Out of a sailors’ grog-shop a short distance ahead lurched two men in mariner’s slops, singing thickly. With a convulsive movement of recoil, Barry swung his companion abruptly round, and they began to retrace their steps. A horror settled upon the boy’s mind.

“Two years ago,” said Barry, in a low voice, shaken with excitement, “I was the coming man in my university. Every one knew that. I was winning a national reputation among biologists. I was in a position of influence and respect, with a splendid future ahead of me. And I’d earned it — my God! I’d earned it. I’d fought every step of the way — do you understand? — fought with my bare hands! I’d wrenched my success out of the very jaws of privation and opposition, with everything against me from the start. Not a soul in the world ever rendered me any

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help. What I had done I had done alone!—Well, look at me!"

He separated himself an instant from his companion, and spread his hands with a gesture of self-derision.

"Cursed, sir; cursed and shackled from my birth. One of my titles I received as a birthright; the other is a maternal heirloom. I like to say them over to myself. Bastard. — Drunkard. — Drunkard. — Bastard. — Ha, very pretty, don't you think?"

Philip thought he saw the man totter, as a horrible laugh shook his gaunt frame. He caught him by the shoulder, and half pushed him onward until he had regained possession of his quailing limbs.

"Don't think about it, old man," he directed, mandatorily. "You're making good now. You're going to win out in spite of everything."

"Oh, yes, this time. I may stave it off this time," replied Barry, weakly. "But what about next time? And what about the time after? The curse does n't depart."

Philip's arm was across his shoulders like that of a brother. "You'll have it under your feet before you're done," he said.

There was a bracing, restorative confidence in his voice. Barry made no answer; but Philip heard him filling his lungs with the crisp night air. As they left

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the water-front and turned up into the city, he felt the man's shoulders taking a determined set.

"I think that's over for this time," said Barry. "For eight months I have n't taken a drop. And I don't intend to, if I have to stay in hell for the rest of my life."

"You'll succeed," said the younger man. "You can't fail."

"I can manage all right usually; I'm sure of myself," said Barry. "But then, some day, all of a sudden, the thing takes hold of me. It's like a mirage in the Sahara, when the traveller is dead from thirst. The very desire is an intoxication; it's an enchantment, a dazzling obsession that will not leave you, no matter how you fight against it. You'd sell your clothes off your back, the brains out of your head, for one drop."

The tide of pity in the young man's heart found no eloquence of words, yet the older man felt it and took strength from it. As they reached the house on Mullin Street, he turned upon him to say, with simple directness, —

"It's you that got me through this; and if I'm in need, I'm going to come to you again."

At the top landing they separated with nothing more than the customary good-night; but as Barry turned away to his room, his eyes, which had not known tears since childhood, were wet.

XIX

THE singular missionary enterprise to which, at the solicitation of Irene Muller, Philip had reluctantly committed himself, was by no means a task of facile accomplishment. It is one thing to bear succour to those who fly signals of distress, quite another to urge it upon those who feel no apprehension of danger and are quick to resent any semblance of officiousness or zeal in another. Queenie had no desire to be made an object of philanthropy. She was perfectly competent, in her own eyes, to look out for herself.

She immensely enjoyed finding herself the recipient of Philip's attentions, so long as she could believe them to be entirely the attentions of gallantry. It flattered her to be seen in the company of so distinguished-looking a young man; she clearly recognized the superiority of his breeding over that of the other gentlemen friends who offered themselves through the medium of her profession; and she liked to feel that her charms were potent in that higher sphere of culture, good-manners, and education to which he belonged.

To be sure, he did not have much money to spend on her, not nearly so much as the others. He could not

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take her out in his own touring-car, nor treat her to lovely lobster-suppers. Indeed, she suspected he must be downright poor, despite what Irene told her to the contrary. But what if he was? There were always others who stood ready to do the swell thing by her. She would accept what she could get of both sorts: culture and looks on the one hand; handsome presents, feeds, and the real thing in the way of good times on the other. The schedule was quite to her liking.

And she did honestly admire Mr. Wetherell's refinement. For one thing, she always felt at ease with him. He was not continually asking her to laugh at coarse witticisms, nor seeming to urge, by each hint and look and gesture, a something which she did not want to be bothered with. So long as she could be coveted, and petted, and talked about, without going, as she put it, the whole figure, she had a distinct preference for virtue. A girl who kept straight had a better chance of marrying well some day; and Queenie was not without dreams of seeing her own name headlined in the New York "Journal" in connection with the entrancing statement, "Millionaire Weds Chorus-Girl," — or, better yet, an announcement that it had been "officially admitted" at the box-office of such and such a theatre that Queenie Muller, the popular comic-opera star, had been privately married to a certain millionaire stockbroker — always a millionaire, you

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may be sure — of Chicago. “This is considered by all odds the most sensational match of the current dramatic season,” etc., etc.

Oh, yes, Queenie Muller of Smilax Street had her ambitious dreams — what chorus-girl has not? — Yet it demanded no very keen observation to ascertain that she was quite destitute of the shrewdness, persistence, and concentration of purpose that alone could make such dreams effective. With a small number of reservations, she always did the thing that was easiest. She wanted a good time. She had been fed with pampering and flattery until her head was completely turned. She was quite the vainest little creature Philip had ever encountered, always posing for the glance of admiration, — fingering her golden puffs, readjusting her sparklet earrings, dabbing at her eye with a point of her handkerchief for an imaginary cinder, — an act which drew attention to the extreme length of her lashes, — absently tapping her tiny, even, milk-white teeth with one finger. Her little tricks of this sort were infinite in number, and practised with incessant assiduity.

As soon as she ceased to hold the centre of the stage in a conversation, her interest grew extremely languid. Her small foot would play a restless tattoo on the floor; she would gaze round the room, making covert experiments in attracting the notice of some other man; work up a fit of coughing which would eventually

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compel her to retire from the scene, the object of universal notice.

Philip found her, indeed, a most embarrassing companion, either in the restaurant or on the street. The modish absurdity of her costume made her everywhere — even in New York — a mark for comment, not always of a very respectful character. Her nasal piping voice could be heard from a distance; her laugh was loud; she must always have her gum with her. Wherever they went, men would turn to stare at her. There could be no question, in the mind of the onlooker, as to her profession. Equally unquestionable, Philip knew, was the rôle imputed to her escort. The knowledge made him wince. All his natural fastidiousness was in arms. It seemed to him, as the weeks went by, that he had made a serious mistake in committing himself to the business. The task was both ungrateful and ineffectual. It could bring no possible benefit either to Queenie or to himself.

He confessed as much one day to Irene, who, having promptly reentered the employ of the hated Tibbs, found many occasions for talking things over with her friend, beside the mail-box of the New York Correspondence Institute of Auto-health.

“You mean” — she asked, anxiously — “you mean she ain’t biting at all.”

“It’s no fault of hers,” answered Philip, grimly.

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“The trouble is that there’s nothing to bite — at least, that’s largely it. What can I really do? What am I really there for? I’ve nothing to offer her that’s of any particular influence or desirability.”

“Is n’t it something, Mr. Wetherell, just to be a nice, true friend to her?” demanded the girl, with a beseeching face. “If you only knew what some of her other friends are like!”

“I do know,” rejoined Philip. “And I am sure that I count with her merely as one of them.”

“Oh, that’s not true, indeed it’s not, Mr. Wetherell,” protested Irene, eagerly. “You must n’t let yourself think that. She says you’re in a class all by yourself. She talks about you all the time to home. She says you’re the most beautifully cultured man she ever knew. Really, Mr. Wetherell, you’ve no idea how much ice you cut with little Queenie.”

Her assurance failed to reassure him. An uncomfortable intimation sprang up in his mind. Queenie might not be quite so simple as she appeared to her sister. Perhaps she had suspected something. Perhaps she, too, had some ulterior object.

“I may be pessimistic,” he said, kicking the carpet vindictively with his toe, “but I can’t resist the belief that somehow or other it all misses fire.”

Irene sighed heavily. “Queenie *is* silly,” she conceded. “But oh, Mr. Wetherell, I honestly don’t think she’s bad.”

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She seemed to him at that moment like a mother, pleading at the bar of justice for her own flesh and blood.

"I'm sure she's not that," he agreed, honestly. There was a lump in his throat which he hotly resented the presence of. He wished that for once he could keep his sympathies free from idiotic entanglement.

"She's just kind of weak," went on Irene. "I don't know how it is; but somehow or other nobody seems to have learned her any principles. She got sort of spoiled to home, I guess, ma bein' what she is, and all. Queenie likes a good time; and that's about all there is to it."

There was a silence, while Irene looked hard at the floor, summoning courage for her next move. Philip could see a flush of embarrassment spreading over her homely features. At last she looked up, with a diffident, apologetic smile, into her companion's face.

"Mr. Wetherell, pardon me for bein' so bold as to ask, but did you ever try talkin' straight goods to little Queenie about them things?"

"No, I never quite saw how," admitted Philip. "I don't think she enjoys being talked to in that way."

Irene gave him a direct scrutiny, in which there was more than a hint of reproach.

"It don't seem to me, Mr. Wetherell, as if you really cared very much about doin' anything for her,

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if you dare n't say a little something now and then that she don't like the sound of. I thought you was more in earnest than that."

The man bit his lip. "I am in earnest," he said. "But I have n't felt sure that that was the way to accomplish anything."

"But how can you tell unless you 'll try," urged Irene, anxiously. "You 're so much older 'n her, an' she respects you such a lot, I can't help thinkin' it might count — I mean, just if you'd tell her, as friendly as you could, what you thought about those things; how you thought a girl ought to act, don't you know, and all that."

There was another pause. Philip held a sullen silence. There were reasons enough in his mind against adopting the course Irene was pressing upon him. He perceived confusedly that it would be evocative of a profound and painful upheaval in another department of his life. He wanted to avoid that. He resented her interference.

Irene looked at him with a lip that quivered. "I know I got no business at all to put the thing up to you like this; but oh, I've been so terrible worried, Mr. Wetherell. One o' them men is hangin' around her all the time; and I can see that he's made sort of an impression with his hellish arguments, and — and, oh, Queenie's such an awful fool, and she ain't got no one but me and you to hold her right."

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She put out a supplicating hand to his coat-sleeve. "You ain't goin' to leave me all alone now, are you?"

Her eyes were blinking with tears. There was no possibility of denying her. Philip grimly yielded. He promised that he would make another effort. He had a date with Queenie for the following Sunday afternoon. He would not let the opportunity slip by.

"Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times, Mr. Wetherell. I'm sure we are goin' to save our little Queenie."

She seized one of his hands with a quick, affectionate pressure, and darted into the Institute. Irene had her sense of the dramatic, no doubt inherited, and she never failed to make the most of her scenes with Philip. She was consumingly in earnest; no one could doubt that for an instant. But the fact did not keep her from appreciating the fascinating possibilities of the situation in which she found herself, that of seeking to save an innocent young sister from the machinations of villainy, and of having for ally one of the handsomest, most aristocratic-looking men she had ever seen. The quick pressure of gratitude she gave his hand was unmistakably spontaneous, a gage of confidence which helped to hold him, more than any other one thing, perhaps, to the very letter of his promise. And if the perfervid "we are goin' to save our little Queenie" had in it an obvious sug-

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gestion of footlights, yet even so, reflected Philip, it was not utterly out of keeping with the rather melodramatic nature of the whole enterprise to which he was committed.

One point was made inescapably, relentlessly clear to him by the new promise that had been wrung from him. He could not preach to Queenie until he had first put his own house in order. The figure of the mote and the beam came to him in all its drastic appositeness. Supposing that his words — as he could scarcely believe — should have some influence with the wayward Queenie, what would the reflex effect of that be upon himself but a new self-contempt, knowing that if the facts of his conduct were once exposed to her, the words would be worse than a mockery. Indeed, it would be perfectly just for her to accuse him of being the falsest of all her friends — in that he had set himself up to be better than the rest.

During the past months he had, perhaps, struck an ignoble pact with his conscience. He had, perhaps, knowingly, wilfully accepted the maxims of sophistry; he might even have been aware, deep down in his heart, that there was no possible reconciliation between his ideals and his practical conduct. Yet until this moment nothing had compelled him to write the word hypocrite against his name.

Henceforth, if he were to live up to his promise, he could no longer evade that shameful necessity: the

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intolerable reproach of it would be ever present in his mind.

Before he had reached the top of the second flight of stairs on the way to his room, he realized that only one course of action was open to him: he must break, once and for all, the net that enmeshed him. He must do it, and he must do it immediately. He had planned to go to Katrinka's Saturday evening. He would not go. He would end the affair now.

It was a moment of high, unsparing resolution. He was rendering obedience to a voice sterner than any he had heretofore hearkened to; and the voice was bidding him tear from his bosom a thing he loved and crush it under his heel. He knew that if he waited he should not have the strength to obey.

He lighted the gas in his mansarde, took out his note-paper, and began to write. He was surprised to find himself so calm. His mind seemed to be pervaded by a dry, white, pitiless light in which no illusion, no mirage, no self-deception could have being. The stern daughter of the Voice of God had spoken peremptorily; there was no shadow of doubt within him as to the necessity of the step he was taking. The hopeless, consuming longing and regret might follow: it was sure to follow; but that was a problem for the future. When he had once taken the irrevocable step, he could set out to adjust himself to the new conditions.

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The note he wrote was courteous, explicit, and honest. It told her that whatever might be right or wrong for others in these concerns, he knew that it had been wrong from the first for him to do as he had done; and that to break things off at once was the only way in which he could be square by himself. — There it stood, at last, a statement of the truth as he knew it. It was a grim satisfaction to see it set down in words that he could not honestly retract or go back from.

There was little more than that in the note. He did not dare indulge himself in any words of regret. He knew that he must not yield an inch to sentiment. In the treacherous valley where he stood, one step either to the right or to the left of the bare, rock-grounded path he had chosen to follow, would mean his ruin. Quagmire, pitfall, and gin were on every hand. Harsh, unlovely Truth must be his guide before, while Duty remorselessly laid the whip to his shoulders.

He sealed the missive dully, and addressed it. Then he broke the envelope, and read the letter through again, — read it twice. Slowly, and with fingers that shook a little, he slipped it into a second envelope, and rewrote the address.

He stared at it lying there on his desk, and thought of all it meant in the baring and narrowing and roughening of his life thenceforth. Every hour passed with Katrinka was, in its way, an hour of beauty. Every

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word from her lips, every movement of her body, was music. And now these hours of music and beauty, this devotion of sense and imagination that appealed so potently to the artist in him, — that child of love and sunshine so often cruelly at variance with the other ruler of his soul, the stern hill-dweller, — it was all to be destroyed, cast away, and for the sake of a silly, rattle-brained little flirt, who was destined to go her own way just as heedlessly for all that he might sacrifice.

“No, not for this,” answered the voice from the hills. “It is the inevitable struggle of that ideal which you have, for a time, dethroned, to regain once more its ascendancy over the soul. If the struggle is lost, you will be forever in your own eyes a creature of weakness and contempt.”

Philip sprang to his feet, caught up the envelope, sped down the stairs, and sought the nearest mailbox. He opened the slot and, as it shut, heard the soft, dull fall of his letter amongst the other letters that were waiting there, with their messages of gladness and tragedy, of despair and hope, until the time should come for them to go forth upon their myriad ways.

It seemed to him, suddenly, as he stood there on the cold street under the flickering arc-light, that he had slain a lovely and precious thing. A great misery and loneliness settled upon him. There was no one

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in the world who cared for him as she cared. If he had made a triumph in the cause of Morality, it was the barrenest, dreariest triumph that had ever been made in that stern cause.

XX

It was late winter in the country of hills. A waste of pale, waterish snow, only half concealing the dead earth, was flung abroad like a tattered and discarded mantle under a grey sky. Each gleaming tree-trunk stood in the centre of a little snow-bared circle; each skeleton stalk of wild carrot or goldenrod rose through a tiny, cup-like aperture of its own. In the hollows of the lawn grey streaks showed where the water had drained out of snow that lay higher and whiter.

Everywhere was the soft, dull sound of dripping moisture, — from the wet branches to the wet sod; from the high, flat roof of the house to the tin roof of the porch; from the roof of the porch to the steps and flagstones below. Now and again, while Georgia had been reading to her father in the library, a splash of dampness would come down the chimney and fall with a hiss and a jet of steam into the smouldering wood fire.

She sat by the window, for the wan afternoon light — though it was not yet four o'clock — soon lost itself in the dusky spaciousness of the apartment. The reading was over now. Beside her lay a closed volume of War memoirs. She had reached the end of the

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chapter; and the book would not be taken up again until after supper. In its place she was indifferently busying herself with a piece of embroidery intended for an old school friend who was soon to be married.

The room was very quiet. The Colonel's chair had been let back into a reclining position, and he lay very still, while an expression, which had lately become customary with him, of melancholy and weakness, slowly dominated his countenance. During the winter his condition had changed but little. The valvular trouble was slightly more pronounced. Debility was gaining on him. The processes of dissolution were at work, but imperceptibly to any but a watchful eye. It was a gentle, unpainful relaxation of life. The tender solicitude of his daughter, who was always beside him, making him her first thought in every concern of the day, should, it would seem, still more have eased the slow steps that led him down toward the dark river.

Yet Colonel Raeburn seemed not to know that happy fortitude which is characteristic of his race and of his religion in the presence of death. He was not rebellious; but he was not content. Georgia was constantly aware of it. Something more than his body, it seemed to her, was in the clutch of disease. He was the prey of strange fits of despondency. A gloom, rarely lifted, had settled upon him, a cloud of dark thoughts which, except for the brief hours when she

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managed to distract him with reading or chat or argument, did not release him from its heart of despair.

What the subject of these meditations might be, Georgia could not conjecture. Since the terrors of that November night, when her father's soul had bared itself for a lurid second to her gaze, no revealing words had passed his lips. Whatever his grief might be, it was deeply and resolutely locked in his breast.

Georgia entertained, indeed, a proud, sensitive reluctance to pry curiously into her father's secrecy. She revered him too deeply for that. She believed in him too implicitly. If he wished to make her a party to his confidence, he knew that she was ready to take upon her shoulders whatever burden he could entrust to her. If he told her nothing, it was because he knew the burden to be for him alone.

She too had her unshared, unshareable burden; and her strength often flagged under it. Just now it seemed to her that it was too heavy to be borne. Ah, why, why, she asked herself, bitterly, as she raised her eyes from her work and gazed vaguely out of the window across the melancholy waste of snow, under the dripping evergreens and locusts — why must her chiefest support and stay have failed her just at the moment when most she needed it.

How she had come to love him! How she loved him still, how she longed for him, at the moments when forgetfulness sealed the poisonous, love-slaying

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realities from her thought! Ah, but the sealing was never for long, except in dreams, and the waking always followed; the return of the bitterness and shame. While she had known the anguish of the olive-garden, he had slumbered and slept, nay, he had drunk freely the cup of pleasure, unable to hold the watch one hour. How often she had reexperienced that first shuddering recoil that had seized her on the blighted summit of Yelping Hill. It was as if something at the very fountain-head of life in her had been stricken with pestilence, and could never be healed.

Out across the waste of pallid snow wandered forth her solitary spirit, beyond the veiled, mist-banked horizon, upon a mournful journey of doubt, conjecture and bitter regret, where no other soul could give her companionship. This was loneliness! Loneliness had been her only companion for all these months, yet accepted proudly, without a quiver of the lip, because of the blood that was in her.

Suddenly there fell upon her ears the sound of a splashing trot in the driveway, and peering out toward the gate, she perceived a chunky, furry-legged pony and an old-fashioned low-bodied chaise drawing near. Every one in the vicinity of Folkbridge knew that chunky pony and the ancestral chaise. What could Miss Wetherell be wanting out here? She rarely drove so far from the village in winter, when the roads were bad. The vehicle, Georgia could see, was

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splashed to the top of the calash; Peter looked as if he had been wading.

Could it be news? Had something happened to him? Or had she come, perhaps, with some kindly plan to propose for a reconciliation? The girl's back stiffened involuntarily, as a host of vague possibilities, all of them related in one way or another to the subject of her interrupted reverie, flashed across her mind. Except for the exchange of a casual word sometimes at church, she had not had any speech with Miss Wetherell all winter.

The Colonel had noticed her movement of attention, as she bent toward the window.

“Is some one coming?”

“Miss Wetherell, father.”

“What! Prudence Wetherell? A very strange day for her to be driving out here, I should say.”

“The roads must be in terrible condition,” said Georgia, dully.

The Colonel turned a glance of keen inquiry upon his daughter's face.

“I wonder what can be her object,” he said.

His glance told him nothing. Georgia's face evinced no disquietude. Dread may have tightened at her throat; but there was no external sign of it. Since the day when Georgia had told him, with perfect simplicity and composure, that she and Philip Wetherell were no longer friends, his name had not been men-

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tioned between them. That she was not happy he had guessed, because the cheerfulness of her words and manner seemed too calculated, prompted by a resolution to be cheerful, rather than by the inward spirit of joy that had once irradiated all that she did. To him, too, at this moment, came the thought that Miss Wetherell's visit might concern her nephew.

"I'm sure I can't imagine," said Georgia, with a nervous little laugh. "It seems an odd day to choose for a call."

The chaise drew up at the porch; but the occupant did not descend. Summoning all her self-control, the girl went to the door.

"Why, how do you do, Georgia," said Aunt Prudence, from the depths of a queer great-coat that muffled her to the ears. "I thought I would n't climb out until I had put Peter in the barn, if it was agreeable to you."

"Certainly, Miss Wetherell. How nice it is to see you out here! Wait till I slip on some rubbers, and I'll go with you."

Her manner was the perfection of affability, while in her mind the disconcerting question repeated itself again and again: "What can she want? — What can she want?"

"By no means, my dear," protested the visitor, smiling. "Do you think I require your assistance in tying my restive, mettlesome Peter? No, into the

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house with you at once; you'll be taking cold. In twenty seconds I shall be along."

Her news could not be bad news, Georgia told herself, with quick relief; else she could not have spoken so gayly.

"You'll see her, father?" she asked, re-entering the library. "I take it it's a family call."

There was a suppressed urgency in her voice that did not escape him.

"Surely I will," he answered. "It's ten months at least since I've set eyes on Prudence Wetherell."

The back of the reclining chair was slightly raised, another cushion slipped under his shoulders, and the afghan over his knees adjusted. By the time Aunt Prue reappeared at the door, he was ready to see her.

"You're going to come right into the library," said Georgia, with a charming smile. "Father is sitting up to-day, and it will do him good to have a little visit with you."

Aunt Prue had doffed her great-coat and her heavy driving gloves in the barn, and her costume now revealed the prim daintiness that was so peculiarly appropriate and becoming to her. They entered the library, and for a few minutes the conversation, starting with the unseasonable weather, the shocking condition of the roads, and the state of Colonel Raeburn's health, followed consecrated lines. At last, after a

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momentary lull, the visitor broached the special occasion of her visit.

"I wanted to ask you, Georgia, if you would take charge of a little booth at the bazaar we are organizing for the Seamen's Gospel."

The girl replied with an eager alacrity that surprised no one so much as herself: —

"Oh, a bazaar! How perfectly lovely! When is it going to be?"

She felt her pulses leaping, as if at the reception of joyful tidings.

Aunt Prue was immensely gratified by the unexpected reception of her proposal; and she beamed happily at the girl.

"You love the dear sailors, too, don't you?" she asked. "I was thinking about them all the way out this afternoon, wondering what such weather as this must be on the ocean. What a brave, hard life they lead, out there, so far from the comforts of home! And I could but picture the satisfaction some of them would find — at least I hope so — in the comfort-bags I thought we could make up out of the proceeds of the bazaar. In War days, Colonel Raeburn, did you not find the comfort-bags that our Union women provided *truly* a comfort?"

The Colonel gave an emphatic affirmative to her question, and was led to recount a couple of reminiscences of the quaint letters that often accompanied

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the patriotic gifts. Georgia was delighted to hear him talking so much like his old self, though it bespoke more clearly than anything else could the heavy change that had come over him during the past months.

“And I have been thinking,” resumed Aunt Prudence, “of the articles that we could most profitably include, — warm socks, of course; a snug sweater in one of the brighter colours that sailors are so fond of, green, or red, perhaps; a New Testament, inexpensive, but with large, clear type, for the light in the fo’c’sle” — Aunt Prue did not fail to do homage to the term — “is certain to be poor and smoky, at least on the sailing vessels; a neat little sewing kit, with coarse needles such as a man likes; a tiny mirror, a nice comb and brush, writing materials for the home letters, — let me see, what else? — oh, I thought, in case our money held out, a compact little medicine-case — just the very simplest remedies, you know, in some condensed form like pellets; though I’m sure I don’t know whether the dear lads could be persuaded to use them. Sailors are very fatalistic, according to the reports, in such matters; and the most they will do, only too often, is to take a swig from the gin bottle.”

She sighed heavily, and asked for the Colonel’s opinion in the matter of the medicine-cases.

“Of course,” she concluded, “everything is still

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very vague and uncertain. Much will depend upon the success of the bazaar. Georgia, I wondered whether you would be willing to take charge of the candies, — or would you rather have the souvenirs? I thought we might have one booth devoted to little curios, such as pretty shells and such things from the sea; some of them made over, perhaps, into little fancy articles, like pincushions, others decorated with oil paints. I have an idea such a feature would prove very attractive. You would, of course, be dressed in some appropriate sailor costume. I have an old necklace of shark's teeth you could wear, if you fancied it. It is a real curiosity."

For the next quarter-hour the conversation confined itself to plans for the bazaar, which Aunt Prue thought might be held in the early spring, just after Easter.

"It seemed to me important," she said, "that we should be getting preparations under way, so as to make as sure as possible of success. It is a great encouragement to me to find at least one enthusiastic helper."

There was an odd little pause, while she still delayed her departure. Aunt Prudence cleared her voice, and seemed on the point of saying something else; then altered her mind, and was silent, occupying herself absorbedly in drawing on her black silk gloves a little more snugly.

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Georgia got up abruptly to mend the fire, and prolonged the task until pride sent her back once more to her seat. She made some painfully obvious remark on the condition of the roads, that mortified her, and that made the little eddy of talk it aroused seem only an impertinence in the silence which promptly settled down again. Georgia felt her fingers tingling nervously under the protracted strain of it.

"Well," said the little woman at last, with a faint smile, "I think I had better be running along. The afternoon is far on the wane."

She bade the Colonel good-day in her quaint, charming fashion, and Georgia quitted the room with her, forcing herself, despite Miss Wetherell's protest that it was not in the least necessary, to accompany her as far as the barn.

They picked their way across the area, where the slush lay deep, and entered the carriage-shed. A few meaningless words passed between them. That was all. The subject that had not been mentioned lay like a load of lead on the girl's heart. The triviality of every other subject made her ashamed, almost, to be talking at all.

Aunt Prue muffled herself in her grotesque driving costume, untied the chunky pony, and backed him out into the drive, with many sturdy cries of "Back, Peter, back, I say!" and many caressing pats upon the neck. It took her a very long time. Georgia stood

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by, watching. She longed to have Miss Wetherell depart; and yet she could not bear the thought of being left alone, — left alone without a word. She had been stricken with dread lest Aunt Prue should speak of the subject that most intimately concerned them both. Now she dreaded even more painfully to see her leaving Highstone without even a hint or a question — as if he had never existed.

“Well, good-by, Georgia,” said Aunt Prue, taking the girl’s hand. For an instant she held it, and with a pressure that was unmistakable, while her grey eyes were lifted to her companion’s face with a look of timid appeal.

Georgia felt herself choking. She could not face those eyes. She could not respond to the pressure of the hand. She had nothing to say. With a new pang she realized that her secret was not to be shared.

“Good-by, Miss Wetherell,” she said. “I am sure we are going to make a real success of it. It will be great fun.”

The little woman in the enormous great-coat dropped her hand, and put one foot on the step of the chaise. Then with a quick revision of her thought, she turned once more to the girl.

“You never hear from him, now?”

The words had a frightened sound. Georgia shook her head, with lips tight pressed to keep back the sob that swelled in her throat.

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Two tears suddenly appeared in Aunt Prue's grey eyes. She turned quickly and climbed into the chaise. She backed Peter a little farther, then headed toward the gate. Still Georgia looked on in silence.

Aunt Prue started up the pony, but pulled him abruptly to a halt as she came up by the girl. She leaned from the low seat as far as she could toward her ear, and whispered, —

“Georgia, dear, whatever it may be that has happened, I — I ” — but the girl could not hear the low words that followed.

Miss Wetherell gathered the reins quickly, and flapped them upon the back of the chunky pony.

“Get up, Peter!” she cried.

XXI

SUNDAY afternoon, when Philip called in at the Smilax Street tenement to take Queenie for her "missionary outing," — as he sardonically termed it to himself, — she was still at her toilet. Irene, who came to the door, garbed in a kitchen apron, would not permit him to give her a hand with the dinner dishes.

"Well, I guess not," she declared. "You just run into the front room and have a nice little chat with ma. I'll be along in a jiffy."

Reluctantly he obeyed her. At his entrance the invalid put by her novel with a smile of welcome, and murmured a request that he draw up the ottoman beside the sofa.

"It will make you seem not so far away, somehow," she explained.

Philip seated himself, and made the conventional inquiry as to her state of health.

A heavy sigh preluded her response. "Only another of my foolish little turns," she elucidated bravely. "I dare say it means nothing."

The look she gave him, and the almost imperceptible shake of the head, indicated that the truth might be far otherwise; and she proceeded to recount to

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him, with considerable detail, the strange, baffling, unprecedented symptoms of this latest attack. Her voice dropped to an intimate whisper.

"I would not care for myself," she confided. "But, my brave little girls! — they have so much to bear as it is!"

Several painful seconds passed before she could speak again. Philip hoped against hope that the affecting part of the interview was over; but when the invalid invited him, by a fond, maternal gesture, to give her his hand, he knew that worse was yet to come.

"You will not mind an old woman's whim," she begged. "I feel, somehow, as if something were bringing us very close together."

She turned a look of meaningful intentness upon him, which for an instant he was quite at a loss to interpret. Surely she could not imagine — oh, the idea was preposterous! He waited stupidly for her to go on. She gave his hand a gentle pressure.

"I thought at first," she murmured, "that it was the oldest of my little blossoms; but now I see that it is the youngest: my little Queenie. Am I right?"

Philip stared at her in dismay. "Indeed, Mrs. Muller, you are in error," he exclaimed. "We are good friends, — nothing more, I give you my word."

She released his hand suddenly, and pressed her

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fingers lightly to her heart to stay its wild fluttering. "Oh, I have been indiscreet!" she gasped. "What have I said!"

"Pray don't let it disturb you in the least," interjected Philip, soothingly. "It's a matter of small moment."

"Ah," she said, "you know how to make allowances for the mother heart. Its only crime is that of being perhaps too fond."

Philip was uncomfortably conscious that his face had flushed hotly, and he could but suspect that his hostess would interpret the fact after her own fashion. But her next remark indicated that she could adapt herself with perfect grace and ease to the diplomatic demands of any situation.

"At all events," she said, "I may tell you how sincerely glad I am that you two are good comrades. Queenie is my special pride, my little sunbeam. It delights me that she has found a *friend* who is in every way so worthy of her!"

She smiled at him mistily over a bosom that lifted and fell, and concluded the dialogue in the approved fashion:—

"But hush! I think I hear her coming."

The little sunbeam entered; and an instant later followed the little staff, to give assistance with the veil. Queenie had never succeeded in making such a marvellous creation of herself as to-day. Philip had

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been till now unaware that the feminine toilet comprised so many possibilities of modish horror. The thought that they were to take tea together at the Casino struck him with dismay. But his dismay was unshared by any other of the company.

“Oh, you look just too lovely for anything, dearie,” was Irene’s comment. “Don’t she, Mr. Wetherell?” — And she sent a look of sisterly pride over Queenie’s shoulder at her friend.

The invalid was favoured with a demonstrative embrace of farewell; likewise Irene; and then they were off.

Queenie was in the most radiant spirits. She had never been so loudly herself as that fateful afternoon. When they hailed the Fifth Avenue ‘bus at Eighth Street, she protested that she never, never in the world, could climb those dreadful stairs. Philip suggested that they go inside; but no, she must have a seat on top if she croaked for it; and with many little shrieks of mingled fright and mirth, she was helped up. At once she fell limply into a seat, panting for breath, fanning herself with her muff, and declaring between gasps, that she certainly had tumbled to that for fair.

Since Philip had last seen her, he had attended the “Pink Butterfly,” and she was full of eagerness to know if he did n’t really think it was the swellest show yet.

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“And say,” she pursued, shifting her gum to the other side, “did you notice that kid next to me in the Ponies — the one at the end? That’s Gertie Beau-champ. Gertie’s the real article, all right, all right. Pretty off as she is on, too. Oh, she and I are the greatest chums: we’re perfectly inseparable! There’s an old mutt that’s perfectly crazy mad about her. He always sets there in the front row, way over to the left, and cheese! don’t he blow in the bright yellow coin on Gertie! Every night there’s a box of American Beauties on Gertie’s table in the dressin’ room, and all the suppers she wants to Rector’s. Say, Gertie Beau-champ certainly struck it rich.”

As Queenie’s conversation was by no means pitched in a subdued key, Philip felt an intense relief when they quitted the ‘bus at Seventy-second Street, — again with many little shrieks, — and made their way afoot into the Park.

The keen, dramatic beauty of the wintry afternoon colouring, the Moorish fretwork of leafless branches against a west of gold and turquoise, — how Katrinka would have loved it! — was quite lost on his companion; but she was not without occupation, for she had an abundance of criticism to offer upon the costume of every woman they encountered.

“Say, did you ever in your life see such a laugh of a hat?” she would demand, with a superior toss of the head. “That woman must like to make a

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spectacle of herself. It's utterly impossible to wear those new willow plumes, you know, with that sort of a figure."

Philip registered a grim vow that he would broach the subject of the day to his companion as soon as they were well settled at tea. Till then he would submit unprotestingly to anything.

They followed a curving avenue up a gentle slope of brown lawn and red-stemmed shrubbery, until they attained the little eminence where the famous luncheon-house is situated. Seats were secured in a corner of the Palm Room, and English breakfast, toasted muffins, and Bar-le-Duc ordered.

Philip lighted a cigarette, leaned forward intimately on the table, and began. It was the only way. With Queenie there could be no such thing as diplomatic preparation.

"What do you honestly think," he demanded, "of this Gertie Beauchamp? Is she a good sort?"

Queenie opened astonished eyes upon him.

"Why, Mr. Wetherell," she returned. "Whatever do you mean by such a question as that?"

"Just what I say," he rejoined. "Is she a girl with good principles — the kind of girl you want for a friend?"

Queenie pouted, and her eyes grew rebellious.

"Well, I'm sure!" she said. "That's a very strange question indeed!"

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"It may be strange," agreed Philip. "But I'm in earnest about it. I want to know what you think."

Queenie gave him a stony look. "I can't see anything the matter with Gertie," she retorted. "She may not be a saint."

Philip cast about desperately for a cue. "Would you like to have your mother know her?" he asked.

It was an unfortunate venture.

"Mother? Why, ma knows her. Ma thinks she's the real thing. Say, Mr. Wetherell, I wish you'd tell me what you're drivin' at. I don't understand you at all."

Queenie drew herself back with a hint of offended dignity.

Her companion was not to be so easily daunted. "Does your mother know about her friend — the one who sits in the front row?"

The girl's face grew very red. She turned at bay with the hot admonition, —

"Mr. Wetherell, I beg you to remember that Gertie Beauchamp is my particular friend. Be careful what you say."

The man hated to take advantage of the opening she gave him; but it was his cue to speak. "And you have for your particular friend," he broke out, vehemently, "a girl who lives that kind of a life! Does that help *you* to keep good?"

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Queenie bit her lip with anger. "You have no right to talk like that to me," she declared.

"I have the right," rejoined Philip. "My friendship for you gives me that right. I hate to see you running into danger."

"Danger!" echoed the girl, derisively. "Do you mean you think I'm such a fool that I can't keep straight myself, just because a friend of mine does the other thing?"

"I mean," cried Philip, with impassioned earnestness, "that none of us is so strong that he can afford to play with fire. We're all weak somewhere. In this particular matter I'm weaker than you are, because I've gone wrong already. I hope I shan't again; I don't mean to. And so far as the world's way of looking at it goes, it's a lot worse if a girl once makes a mistake, because she's never going to be given another fair chance. The world never forgives her, no matter how much she may want to be good again."

Philip heard his own voice ringing honestly; and no reflections of shame were evoked in his mind by the words he had uttered. There was a stern satisfaction in being able to speak so.

Queenie took a new tack. "Oh, well, Gertie ain't so bad," she announced, guardedly, "even if *some* people may n't approve of everything she does. There's a lot of lovely things about Gertie. She'll do absolutely anything for you, if you get up against

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it. She's lent me money over and over. She's awfully generous to her friends. I never heard her say anything mean and nasty about any one. There's a pile of girls that call themselves good that ain't half so good at heart as Gertie Beauchamp, if I do say it."

"That may very well be," consented Philip; "but I don't think it makes her any the better friend for you. It makes her worse. Unless you're prepared to go as far as Gertie goes, you'd better not be too intimate."

The girl had a burst of sullen defiance. She hated to be preached to. She had not supposed her escort was that kind of a man. She had come out for a good time; and he had spoiled everything.

"Well, what if I do go the whole figure some day?" she demanded, hotly. "That's my own business, ain't it? I don't know as I'm so terrible sure it matters like you say. It's different on the stage than what it is anywhere else. Everybody knows that. In our business it's 'most like you was expected to do that way. Nobody blames you at all. Now look at Gertie — Gertie's the most popular girl in the chorus. I never heard anybody say a word against her till this minute. I don't believe you understand at all what the stage is, Mr. Wetherell. It ain't like other professions, not the least bit in the world."

Philip had no opportunity to reply, for at this moment the waiter appeared with the tea-things; and for a short time the conversation returned, though rather

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constrainedly, to its usual basis of trivialities. But Queenie was out of spirits. She was not having a good time at all. She wished she had accepted another invitation she had had for that afternoon. She would n't have been preached to like this, not a bit of it.

Rather listlessly she devoted herself to a survey of the room. She was sitting in the corner, and could see everything. While she poured the tea, she made comments on the various little groups of people who were seated at the small tables by the windows. Some looked like the real thing to her. Over there was a woman who ought to have had a part in the "Old Homestead." Those two men in uniform must have come off'n one of the warships. Did n't a uniform make a man look awfully different, though? Probably in regular, everyday clothes they would n't be nowhere near so stunning.

"And now I wonder who *those* people are," she continued, "clear over there by the door."

Philip did not turn around, for he knew that a description would follow.

"There's a gent and two ladies. He looks something like the man who plays the drum in our orchestra, only he ain't so fat and don't wear a solitaire. I wonder would one of the women be his wife. The older one, I guess. She kind of looks that way. Seems to me you can 'most always tell; they're so sort o' dull

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lookin'. The other's a regular peach. Graceful! — say, that's no word for it at all! I never saw the beat of it. But say, Mr. Wetherell, if you had hair that was the colour of mashed turnip, would n't you try tintin' it or something?"

A sudden, ungovernable curiosity compelled the man to turn his head — an instant only, but long enough to send the blood flying out of his cheeks. His eyes had encountered Katrinka's.

She had been in animated conversation with the woman opposite; but he had seen the words falter on her lips, and one hand leap to her throat. The instinctive gesture was so quickly disguised that it appeared to be merely some slight readjustment of the high collar she wore; but Philip had understood it.

"Don't you think that's positively the weirdest hair ever?" pursued Queenie, munching a large mouthful of muffin.

With a concentrated effort of self-control, Philip managed to give a satisfactorily matter-of-fact answer to her question. It was a crucial moment. He knew that he must not lose grip on himself, whatever the cost.

"Well, I don't know why she needs to stare at me like that," observed Queenie, with a conscious little toss of the head. "She looks as if she'd eat me up. My goodness, but I bet you that woman got the temper of a wild-beast. — Say, Mr. Wetherell, is

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anything the matter with my hat? Does it look crooked?"

"It looks perfectly straight to me," answered Philip, through lips that felt cold.

"Well," flung out his companion, "if she thinks she can fuss me, she's mistaken. I guess two can stare as well as one. Cat!"

Queenie held her eyes brazenly fixed on the corner of the room, while she sipped superciliously out of her cup. Philip thought he had never seen her look quite so vulgar. And it came over him suddenly what Katrinka's interpretation of the scene would be. At the thought a flood of flame mounted into his neck and face. His head began to swim.

When Queenie at last deflected her gaze — it seemed minutes later — she noticed her companion's embarrassment; and a quick feeling of regret came to her for having been the cause of it by her bad manners.

"Honestly, Mr. Wetherell," she apologized, "I'm sorry I did that. It was n't refined at all, and I know it. When I get my back up I don't seem to have no self-control; and that woman just made me stark crazy mad."

If Philip was singularly unresponsive during the remainder of their repast, Queenie attributed it to the offence he had taken, and did her best to make up for it by an unexampled docility and sweetness.

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She agreed with every remark he made; she fairly hung on his words; she kept her eyes devotedly turned upon him.

At last, "I believe you were right, Mr. Wetherell," she said, contritely, "about that thing we was discussin' — you know what I mean. No, a girl certainly can't be too careful, as things are nowadays. I don't know but I'll have to give Gertie the go-by after all."

"All I wanted," said Philip, resolutely forcing himself into the subject, telling himself that it did n't matter any more what the woman across the room might think of the spectacle before her, — that was over! — "all I wanted was that you should keep your eyes open; be on the watch, you know. You don't mind my taking that much friendly interest in you, do you?"

She gave him a sugary look of gratitude. "I feel very proud," she said, "that you would go to all that trouble for poor little me."

The affectation in her voice did not escape him. He had a sinking conviction that nothing he had managed to say had been of the least avail. At the same time, he had apparently won his point; and he knew that nothing would be gained by pursuing the discussion further. In any case his present mood made it impossible for him. There was only one thought in his mind — that Katrinka would believe

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he had lied to her; that everything she had witnessed during these last minutes would only confirm that belief.

"I declare," said Queenie, "if that cat is n't still watching me out of the tail of her eye. Say, do you mind, Mr. Wetherell, if I go to the dressing-room and take a snook in the glass? I'm sure something's wrong."

"Don't worry," said her companion. "Is n't my word good enough for you?"

"Oh, a man never knows about those sort of things," she replied. "I could have my lid on upside down, and you'd think it looked just exactly as well. I'll be back in a minute."

"You know best," conceded Philip.

A queer panic seized him at the thought of being left alone; but there was nothing that he could say to Queenie.

The girl bent toward him ingratiatingly. "I promise you I won't make up a face when I go by her table."

She rose, gave him a soft little smile, and departed.

Philip sat in his chair, moveless as a wooden image, not touching his food, overcome with a mortification, a sense of having disgraced himself, that was as cruel as it was irrational.

But he had not long to sit thus. He heard light steps behind him, and the next instant an apparition

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dropped into the unoccupied chair opposite. It leaned toward him with a smile; but behind the smile, in the depths of the panther-like eyes of gold-grey, there were both contempt and wild anguish. Two words came from her white lips, hissed so low that no ear but his would have known she had spoken; yet they shivered through his being.

“You lied.”

His eyes fastened upon her with tortured pleading and would not let go.

“Please! — Please!” he begged, in the words a child might employ, seeking to be spared a punishment. “It’s not true, Katrinka. You don’t understand. What I wrote you was true — every word of it. This can all be explained.”

“That’s very easy to say,” she retorted, icily.

“It’s the truth! It’s the truth! I give you my word of honour.”

“Will you explain it to me, if I offer you the chance?”

The man did not realize what he was saying. “Yes, give me the chance. Give it to me. I would be killed sooner than have you think I lied to you.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed. Her face was at once terrible and tender. “I would kill you, Philip,” she said, “sooner than have you leave me for a girl like that. If you do not come to-night, I shall know why.”

Without another word she departed. He did not

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look around, but continued sitting there with his elbows on the table, his eyes blindly on the empty chair, until Queenie returned — he did not know how long after.

“Much good that trip did,” she announced, dryly, as she flounced down into her chair, and began preening her feathers like a little bantam hen. “The hat was all right. Tea’s got stone cold, I suppose; and now she’s gone into the bargain, along with the rest. Say, ain’t that the absolute limit?”

XXII

PHILIP ordered a taxicab for the home trip. In his present turbulent state of mind he could not endure the thought of making himself again an object of common curiosity. He wanted to bring the futile, disastrous afternoon to as prompt a close as possible.

Queenie's spirits had suffered only a transitory depression. At the sight of the taxicab she was quite herself again, and during the entire journey chattered with the blithe inanity of a magpie. It was an additional sop to her vanity that her escort would not accept her invitation to come upstairs to supper, since it showed conclusively that his main interest was centred in herself.

"Well, it's been a perfectly grand time," she said, giving him an astonishing arm-length, crook-wristed grip of farewell. "Good-by, Mr. Wetherell; and I'm goin' to remember what you said."

She whisked into the narrow, dimly lit corridor of the tenement. Philip dismissed the cab, and set out at a stiff pace down the street, careless of where he was going. All he wanted was to get his excitement into harness. Just now it dominated him to the point of making rational thought impossible.

What a gruesome mockery the whole enterprise

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had been from the start! He cursed himself for having gone into it. The memory of what it had vainly compelled him to sacrifice blasted his pride, and blew to a flame resentment and desire. This was all that it had come to: he was branded as a liar and a hypocrite.

The ferocious impulse seized him to throw up the whole ridiculous game, to trample underfoot his new pretensions to a morality that was not of the heart, and to make terms once more with the goddess of his idolatry, his lovely serpent of old Nile, his sprite of the forest of dreams. Was it not this very impulse, obscure at the moment and unrecognized, that had caused him to accede to her challenge that afternoon?

Something more, certainly, than a jealousy for his honour, a mere desire to be vindicated in her eyes, had prompted the impassioned promise. — Ah, to be once more where she was, to surrender to the subtle, capricious magic of her voice, to have the storm within him lulled by her tenderness, and to drink yet once again at the fountain of forgetfulness! . . .

He became aware of an echo in his brain that would not be silenced: words that had awakened, and that reverberated harshly, imperiously upon the barriers of consciousness. The hill-dweller had pitched his tents under the very walls of the city; and he would not be driven back.

So the host of the stern God of Sinai encamped before Jericho; and so they made the circuit of the

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doomed ramparts, blowing the trumpets of ram's horn, marching resolutely, undauntedly, resistlessly upon the fateful journey of conquest, high-ordained. Within the gates of the city of pleasure were defiant laughter, sullen disbelief, and, deep in the heart, fear. And the city was circuited seven times, — seven days.

“Whatever may be right or wrong for another, I know that for me this has been wrong from the first day.” . . .

Something stern and lofty in the man's soul was thrilled by the echoing declaration, — a declaration to which he had committed himself, and which he knew to hold the truth as he had seen it at a moment of clearest, most dispassionate vision. His vision was not dispassionate now. He had only the explicit declaration, and his knowledge of what it stood for, to hold him. His nimble reason had been brought once to bay, and this is what it had given utterance to. It was his option now to crucify his honesty of soul, or to subjugate the enemy.

He felt the sinews of his mind grow tough as iron. Here was a conquest that called for strength and manhood and an austere, unflinching nobility of resolution. There ran in his veins the blood of those who had crossed storm-vexed seas for a moral ideal, and had praised God that he accorded them a place to set up their rest amongst the ice-clad hills of a desert land. For an ideal, once it had irrevocably called him,

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he could be cruel; he could tear his own flesh from his bones; he could strangle every desire for easeful softness, pleasure, and forgetfulness.

Philip took no supper that evening. When the stars came out he was still walking.

Shortly before nine o'clock he found himself standing on the threshold of Katrinka's apartment. She did not rise to greet him, but continued to sit in silence in the deep chair by the fire, with her eyes fixed upon him.

She was garbed in a sheeny gown of dull yellow that clung audaciously to her supple figure and fell in luxuriant drapery folds over the base of the chair. The expression in her face was veiled; but he had never felt so powerfully the indicable spell of it. Such a face might have peered for an instant into the eyes of some ruthless woodsman in the forest, as he felled the secular oak — an instant only, with a faint shriek of pain and fright, from among the débris of leaves and branches, but to haunt him for the rest of his life.

A crushing misery that was closely akin to shame and remorse came upon him. For a time — it seemed minutes — he could not speak. He had an almost irresistible impulse to fling himself at her feet, burying his face in the folds of her gown and imploring her forgiveness. Yet he remained standing, motionless, on the threshold. At last words came to his lips.

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"Do you want me to explain that thing to you?" he asked.

Slowly, very slightly, she shook her head, while her tired, frightened eyes clung to his, as might the eyes of a doomed prisoner to the last gleams of sunlight.

"No," she answered, in a strangely quiet voice. "I know you have never lied to me. — What does it matter about that?"

"Then what did you want me to come here for?" he demanded, dully, struggling to master the anguish in his throat.

She opened her eyes wide with a dimmed wonder.

"Why? — Because I love you, my Lippo. Is not that reason enough?"

The man drew his hand vaguely across his brow, as if to dispel the quivering mirage that dazzled and beckoned.

"But you knew I could not stay," he responded, hoarsely. "It only makes good-by the more cruel, the longer it is put off. I see the way I must go, and it is too late to draw back now."

He started abruptly for the hallway, holding the wall with one hand. But a low, pleading cry arrested him.

"Philip — Come back."

He turned, automatically.

"Sit down. — I want to speak to you."

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He obeyed with the uncanny docility of one in an hypnotic trance.

“I know we must say good-by to each other,—dear. I know I cannot make you happy, no matter how hard I try. There is something in you that cannot be satisfied except in some more noble way than mine. But I do not want you to think I have not any heart. If you suffer, Lippo, I am suffering, too. It is not very pleasant to feel that the one man in the world you love has cast you away. I do not want you to think that I am small and mean; and that I try to keep you against your will. Look, dear,—I send you away. Our lives are different. You have not truly belonged to me even for a day. I have known it; but I did not want to confess it. You have belonged to the other one — the one I took you away from. Go back to her, Philip. It is she can make you happy.”

“I cannot go back to her,” groaned the man, staring blindly into the fire. “She has sent me away, too. I am not worthy of her.”

“Then there is no one?” she asked, with a quick lift of one hand to her bosom.

The man shook his head.

“And you go away to be all alone?”

He nodded mechanically.

The next instant she was on his knees, her white arms flung endearingly about his neck.

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“Lippo,—my Lippo,—why will you not stay with me then just a little longer?”

Her warm fragrance enveloped him. Her soft hands were in his hair.

“Listen. Next week — only eight days — I go away from here, perhaps for always and always. I just have a letter from Frederic that he wants me to meet him at Monte Carlo in April. Come, my dear, say we will still have a few happy times together, *hé?*”

He buried his face, sobbing, on her shoulder, while his senses almost swooned with yearning. She patted his shoulder fondly.

“That would not do much harm to your poor little conscience, *hé* — not so very, *very* much. You could do that for your little Trinka who adores you?”

He held her close in his arms with a pressure that meant surrender; but something in him had not yet surrendered. Something in him was sternly, tyrannically crying out to his reeling spirit. Remembered words of fiery import seared his consciousness and dissipated its delirium. The hill-dweller was arising in the might of those who thanked God for an icy desert, if so be that truth might prevail; and he bade the man be cruel, that he might be true.

Blindly Philip released himself and sprang to his feet.

“I can’t. I can’t,” he cried. “I said it must be

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good-by now. It must be good-by now. This is the end."

The woman sank upon the lounge, as if dealt a numbing blow, shielding her white face with her hands, making no sound.

And in the stricken silence that followed, Philip made his way, steadily and without quailing, into the hall, put on his coat and hat, opened the door of the apartment, and went out. The hill-man, with the sinews of iron, had won again. Was it the final victory?

XXIII

FOR five nights and five days Philip's soul walked alone through a dark valley of desolation. He had won a victory; he had put to the test the stern mettle of his inheritance, and it had not been found wanting; he had had the courage to do the thing he knew he ought to do.

But how empty, how barren it all was in its fruition! Starvation ravened at the very centre of his being. The famine-stricken heart found no sustenance in the consciousness that the behests of duty had been obeyed. The memory of his last sight of Katrinka, sunken to the couch as if mortally hurt, her white hands raised defensively to shield her face from the next blow, — Katrinka who loved him, and who had tried to make him happy, — this memory and a thousand others haunted him.

He worked ferociously both at the office and at home. Work was like a drug. It brought a momentary alleviation of his wretchedness; it enabled him for a little time to forget.

His heart seized upon what humble forage it could find along the highways and hedges. At noon he lingered wistfully about the north side of the Post-Office, where the great mail-wagons were standing

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in a long row; and he surreptitiously made overtures of affection to the horses, bribing them with quarters of apple and lumps of sugar. Their dumb, wise-eyed responsiveness was not without its balm for his spirit. Much to her disgust, Victorine found herself again compelled to open a cat and dog ward in the basement extension, but her thrifty soul could not resist the weekly lure of an extra dollar and a half.

Philip encountered Irene Muller only once. He had hoped to avoid her entirely. He felt as if he could never endure to hear Queenie's name again. Every morning he left the house early, and he did not return until after dinner. But Irene lay in wait for him. She had something to tell him, which she believed would make him happy. She arrived at eight o'clock one morning and camped out beside the mail-box until her friend descended.

"I was just bound I would n't miss you again," she declared, loyally. "You're gettin' away terrible early these days, ain't you?"

"Yes," said Philip, "early for me. I'm crowding on the work just now."

"You look awful tired," she ventured, with sisterly concern. "I do hope you ain't overdoing."

"Oh, it's good for me," he replied, offhandedly.

He made a movement to open the door. She gave him a half-reproachful look.

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"I was n't goin' to keep you but a minute," she said. "But p'raps you ain't got the time."

He drew back his hand from the knob.

"Of course I have. Is it something about your sister?"

"It is."

Her voice dropped to a confidential whisper. "Oh, do you know, Mr. Wetherell, I believe we've saved our little Queenie."

Her auditor had only a sinking sensation at the eager words; but he smiled with a semblance of gratification.

"Indeed, I hope it may be true," he replied.

"I'm sure it's true. She told me you were just like a brother to her. She said you done her such a lot of good. Oh, Mr. Wetherell, I don't know how I'm ever goin' to thank you."

Her eyes were swimming, and she made haste to mop them violently.

"I'm an awful cry-baby," she explained candidly, "when my emotions get played on."

Philip blushed deeply. "I don't flatter myself that I deserve your gratitude," he remarked. "But if anything I said really counted, I'm sure I'm very glad."

Irene was the picture of radiant confidence. She asked Philip to take supper with them that evening.

"I just want you to see for yourself how she's changed already," she urged.

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Philip declined her invitation on the plea of his work; but he promised to come to Smilax Street the subsequent week. He told himself that he would be in a better mood for it by that time. Just now even Irene's sturdy friendship was like apples of Sodom to his hunger.

"We want you to feel," she said, in conclusion, with a luminous, dramatic smile, "that our home is always open to you."

But if circumstances for which she was not responsible had for the moment cast a blight upon his relation with Irene, there was one personal relation that had quite escaped that fate. The new intimacy that had sprung into being between himself and John Barry was entirely outside their influence, and daily grew more precious to him. The barrier which this haughty recluse had so jealously guarded had been demolished now by his own hands, and he opened his heart to the lad with an undisguised affection which was the more appealing because of its diffidence and awkwardness in self-expression. One could almost believe that this was the first time a sentiment of human tenderness had blossomed in the bitter soil of his heart, he seemed so at a loss what to make of it.

The quick lighting up of his furrowed countenance whenever Philip entered the room, the solicitous interest with which he inquired after the success of the

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day's labours, the unaffected pleasure he evinced in reporting any slight, amusing incident of his own day, — all so sharply contrasted with his earlier aloofness and reticence, — deeply touched the boy's sympathies. The man seemed to be surprised himself at his change of attitude, and at times, in the midst of some personal reminiscence, as they sat, late in the evening, before the glowing Franklin stove in Philip's room, he would abruptly check himself, and gaze for a time in meditative silence into the fire.

"I can't imagine," he said one evening after such a pause, "why I like to tell you all these things. I never talked so to any one else."

He laughed awkwardly, and spat into the fire. Philip took several puffs at his pipe before he found an explanation to offer.

"It's partly that your other friends have had more intellectual interests in common with you," he suggested. "You can't talk shop with me."

"My other friends!" echoed Barry, with a mirthless laugh. "I never had any. I've never desired friendship. I've never known what it was. That's what makes it so surprising that it should have come to me, unasked."

Though he never offered the younger man a connected narrative of his life, he no longer entertained the least secretiveness in regard to it. He seemed anxious to be understood. He seemed to covet Philip's

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respect, to want to prove to him, if he might, that he was not entirely unworthy of the friendship so freely offered. Bit by bit Philip came into possession of the harsh outlines of his history; and, in measure as he did so, he ceased to wonder at the cynicism of the man.

Before her love-child was five years old, his mother, an ignorant country girl of the Potomac highlands, had found a husband, and followed him up the Shenandoah Valley, leaving the child in the possession of a shrewd, heartless grandmother.

"If among all my precious fellow-beings I have despised one more than the rest," said Barry, bitterly, "it is the man who was responsible for my existence, — some sneaking, Psalm-singing captain in the Army of the Potomac, whom granny nursed in her own cottage. It does n't matter to me whether the old woman had some diabolical scheme of her own or not: she was capable of it; it's certain she blackmailed him for twelve years, perhaps longer. I ran away at the age of twelve, and never saw her again, nor my mother; and from neither of them had I ever learned my father's name. I don't know whether he's alive or dead; but I've cursed him all my life for a sneak and a coward. If his eternal happiness hung on a word of mine, I would n't speak the word."

Something Philip learned of the terrible struggle

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the proud, friendless lad had made, finding his way barefooted to Baltimore, penniless, ignorant of the world, with nothing to support him in the fight except an indomitable resolution to win out.

“At eighteen,” he said, “late one night in the little room behind the drug-store, where I was boning away by myself for some college examinations, I came upon that first soliloquy of Gloucester’s bastard son in “King Lear.” Do you remember it?

“Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom?—”

He recited a dozen lines of the famous speech with impressive fervour.

“For me,” he observed, “that was a declaration of faith. It was a truth I had always felt, always believed, always known, indeed,—that, bastard though I might be, I was not of baser, but of nobler composition than the rabble. I had the unconquerable conviction in me that I could achieve something, arrive somewhere, be some one. Already I had climbed from starving errand-boy to apothecary’s clerk; I had educated myself until I was nearly ready for college,—late at night, often after one o’clock I was studying; and long before daylight, winter mornings, after I had swept out the shop and built the fire, I would plunge into my books again. I went without shoes to get books,

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especially Darwin and Tyndall and the other naturalists of the revolutionary epoch. Huxley was my idol; it was he that determined me, at whatever cost, to force my way into the domain of science, — the domain of my natal goddess."

Some glimpses Philip had into the turbulent, audacious years that followed: the brief enrolment as scholarship student at a sectarian college, where his radical views, arrogantly asserted, came promptly into fatal clash with the rigid conservatism of the teaching; then years of undaunted self-preparation for the university, while from morning till evening he slaved over druggist's prescriptions and account-books to lay by a scanty hoard; the proud day when he saw himself listed as a candidate for an advanced degree at a prominent institution of learning; the brilliant promise of his scholarly career, and then — in the midst of it — the falling of a new, blasting shadow across his life, a shadow that had come upon him insidiously, almost unawares, until its blackness enveloped him.

"I had the curse — the inherited predisposition in me. And I was overworking. The thing was always waiting there to give me rest, to make me forget fatigue and discouragement, a good familiar creature, as Iago terms it. It never seemed to be my own hand that reached out and took it; it was some shadowy hand out of the undying past. I say that not to excuse

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myself, but in the attempt to account for the fact that it seemed to be the one point where my volition was of no avail."

And the curse had wrought disgrace at the very moment when a success more conspicuous than any that preceded seemed to be within his grasp: a promotion to full professorship in the large western university where he held an appointment.

"Only three persons in the world," said Barry, "know what has become of that man."

Philip looked at him in astonishment.

"Three men," repeated Barry: "my lawyer, the dean of the faculty of science, and you."

"How long ago was that?"

His companion made a brief mental calculation. "Two years, eight months, thirteen days," he announced, grimly. "Having concluded that the game was up, I dressed myself like a hobo, got away at night before the trustees had time to take any action, beat my way to Seattle, and shipped on a lumber schooner, under a new name, for Sitka. I roughed it down there for a year and seven months. I thought I'd abandoned the other thing — the intellectual thing — forever; but it would n't release me.

"Finally I saw that I must get back into it or die in the effort. I had to come back. I chose New York because of the libraries and museums, and also because nobody knew me here, though for that matter

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Alaska had put a beard on my face and pretty much changed my complexion."

"How long have you been here?" asked Philip.

"Ten months. I earn twenty-two fifty per week at a wholesale drug-house, and outside I'm working up a bit of embryological research I was engaged on when the smash-up came. I've gone under only twice. I have n't taken a drop for eight months. I'm holding my own. I may win yet."

"Win!" said Philip, admiringly. "You'll win all right!"

"It's not hard to be confident," observed Barry, critically, "when you don't fully know the nature of the difficulties. On a night like this assurance and hopefulness come readily. But who can say when the next madness may descend upon him? I've been in a restless, ticklish condition of mind all this week. It disturbs me a little. The end has n't come yet — I know that much."

Philip had an impulse to say something; but he did not. Barry perceived the promise of loyalty in his face, and no words were needed.

It was a source of genuine comfort to the boy to know that in at least one human relation he held a positive and useful standing. It came to him also that there was a strange fellowship in the struggles they were making. What was the snare from which he was forcing himself to break free but a species of intoxica-

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tion, a cup that beaded to the brim with exhilaration and rapture, but that held in its dregs shame. He did not tell Barry of the conflict that was racking his own soul, for he was reluctant to add to the older man's burden of bitterness; but he derived a secret inspiration and reinforcement from the thought that they were standing together for an ideal of self-mastery.

Yet how slowly, how heavily and thanklessly, the week crawled by. Every night the thought overwhelmed him that another day had been subtracted from the fateful sum. It was an unspeakable relief to know that the end was near. It was also anguish of heart.

The thought never left him that still, still there would be time to return to Katrinka. She would have a welcome for him even to the final hour. She would forget his cruelty. She would sing again the old, oblivious Siren-song that his senses were famished to hear. A dozen times he was on the point of writing to her. He seemed to know that, before the week was out, he was going to write to her. A deep, unacknowledged intimation came to him that his strength was not going to hold out much longer. The struggle was too ruthlessly exhausting; the yielding too easy, too excusable, so to speak, to be forever resisted. But the shackled, heavy-footed days crawled by; and still he had not yielded.

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Friday evening, as he mounted the second flight of stairs, his nostrils detected a remembered aroma. His neighbour was making coffee. A quick, anxious suspicion hurried his steps. He threw down the portfolio he was carrying, upon his table, in the dark, and entered the front apartment.

Barry was lying on the bed, fully dressed. But for his eyes, which were wide open and glowed with feverish brightness, he looked like a dead man, with colourless, sunken features, and a posture of unnatural rigidity. At the sight of the boy he half rose, putting a hand roughly, vaguely, to his brow.

“Oh,” he said, “you’ve come.”

Philip threw off his coat, and sat down on the edge of the table.

“Sure,” he said. “And I’m going to stay awhile, if you’ll let me.”

The older man stared at him, without smiling. “I’d made up my mind,” he muttered, hoarsely, “to wait until eight o’clock; and if you had n’t come by then, I’d have gone. I had only ten more minutes to wait. I hoped you would n’t come till afterwards.”

“But I did come,” said Philip. “So now you can’t get rid of me.”

He saw the muscles of the man’s ashen face working spasmodically, as he braced himself for the new battle.

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“That’s good of you,” said Barry, resolutely. “Perhaps I shall pull out of it yet.”

“Why don’t we go to the theatre?” suggested the boy. — “Some noisy, trashy thing, with cheap music and a lot of horseLaughs. Don’t you think that would be sort of fun?”

“Let’s try it,” said Barry, rising to his feet and shaking himself. “I don’t care much what we do, so long as we do something. I think I’d like to see a show.”

They went to a music hall on Eighth Avenue. They sat in the dirty second balcony and smoked, and Philip plunged into a hot argument, between the acts, with a couple of newsboys over the respective merits of the various performers. Barry appeared to be amused, though he maintained an almost unbroken silence; and his companion was hopeful.

Shortly after eleven they were on the street again. They walked for an hour before returning home. The evening was behind them. Yet Philip knew that Barry was still in the midst of his ordeal. He continually felt his arm shaking with a nervous chill. Once he had perceived his teeth chattering, though the air was mild. When they reached the head of the stairs, Philip suspected a reluctance on the man’s part to be left alone.

“Wait,” he said. “Why don’t I tow my cot into your room? I’d sleep just as well there.”

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“Oh — are you sure?” asked Barry, intently.

They took up the narrow couch and carried it in, setting it down alongside the other. Then they went to bed. Philip pretended to go to sleep; but he did not, in reality, for a moment. He heard Barry’s restless breathing; he heard him turn and toss; more than once he heard him muttering incoherent things to himself. Perhaps two hours passed. Then the man had a protracted chill. The trembling of the bed was communicated. Philip even heard the chattering of his teeth. He lay there, for a time, motionless, in aching sympathy; but at last he could endure it no longer. He slipped without a word into the next bed, and took the suffering man in his arms, warming him with his own body.

“Poor old chap!” he muttered. “It’s pretty damned rough.”

After a while Barry grew quiet again, and fell off into a restless slumber. Philip returned to his cot; and when morning came, no mention was made by either of them of the circumstance.

Barry looked sick, and utterly discouraged.

“You’d better let me go,” he said. “It’s no use trying to stave it off any longer. The game’s not worth the candle.”

“That’s not proved yet,” said Philip. “I’m not going down to the office this morning. What do you want to do?”

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"I don't know anything to do," answered the other, dully.

"Why not run up to the Bronx," proposed Philip, "and hang around the Zoo? I've never seen it."

Barry's face lightened. "First-rate," he said. "They have some good things there. The bird-house is superb. I have n't visited it but once."

The morning went by more than satisfactorily. Barry seemed to become more and more himself. He talked volubly, offering a thousand curious and interesting comments. He was in his element. He discussed the relative cranial development of the various anthropoids, and pointed out the homologies. As they wandered through the reptile-house he was insensibly led into a fascinating disquisition on protective coloration. Later he developed the various theories of sexual selection in birds, and while they were taking lunch at an obscure dairy restaurant at West Farms, fell into a long, earnest exposition of the problems of migration.

Then, of a sudden, almost between sentences, the shadow fell again upon him. The light died in his eyes, and a savage, wolf-like craving peered wildly out.

"I believe I'm mad," he muttered, through lips that were white. "I could kill you for hanging on to me like this."

Philip shuddered in spite of himself at the man's

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look of desperation. He doubted whether he possessed the power, after all, to hold that ruthless appetite in check much longer.

"What do you propose to do now?" demanded Barry, harshly.

"Go home and play chess," said his companion.

"I can't play chess," retorted the other, defiantly.

"That's nonsense," rejoined Philip. "Of course you can. You can put your mind on it, if you'll only make the effort; and it'll give you something to think about."

"I'm not going," said Barry. "Go along yourself. You've been very kind to me, and I'm deeply obliged. I'll get on all right now without you."

"Don't be a fool!" cried Philip, roughly. "Are you going to come with me, or not?"

A hunted look came into the other's eyes.

"Oh, yes, I'm going with you," he answered, resentfully submissive.

They reached Mullin Street about three o'clock. There was a letter waiting for Philip on the hall stand. A wave of dizzy emotion surged over him at the discovery of it.

"Get the things ready," he said to Barry, as they reached the top floor. "I'll be with you in a minute or two."

He dashed into his room, shut the door, and tore

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open the envelope. There was a shimmering, colourful mist before his eyes. He leaned against the door, holding the sheet of paper in both hands, for steadiness, while he read what Katrinka had written. It was a short note, very simple, altogether like her in its expression.

"My own dear Lippo," it began. "I know you will not be so cruel as to let those last words of yours be our good-by. I want something *happy* to remember for the end. I cannot tell you, dear, how I have suffered all this long week. Oh, how can you be so hard, my own dear boy, to your poor little Katrinka, who cannot live without another sight of your dear face. I am going to tell myself that you will come sure, *sure*, Saturday night. Oh, my Lippo, you *must* not stay away this once."

Delirious longing took possession of him. No, it was true, he could not stay away. He must go to her; he must go to her, this once — this once more. He crushed the perfumed missive to his lips. He was sick for her caresses. He was going to her.

His ear caught the sound of a creaking board in the stairway. Dread leaped into his mind. He flung open the door. Barry was half-way down the stairs, in hat and coat.

"Look here!" cried Philip, harshly. "Where are you going?"

The man gave him a look of hate.

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“None of your business,” he retorted. “I go where I please.”

Philip darted to the head of the stairs.

“Come back, you coward,” he commanded. “Are n’t you man enough but you must sneak away while I’m not looking?”

Barry returned a defiant gaze into the flashing eyes; but the next instant the defiance disappeared, and a look of cowed, sullen submission took its place. Silently he remounted the stairs and entered his room. Philip followed him. It was a quarter past three.

They sat down at the chess-board. They played without a stop until half-past six. Philip had never fought so hard in his life as during those hours. He was fighting for a man’s soul. He knew that a minute’s relaxation would mean defeat.

At half-past six he proposed that they forage for a bite of supper.

“I have a few eatables in my room,” he said, “and you can make some coffee.”

He went to the speaking-tube in the hall, and asked Victorine if she could spare them a bowl of soup and some dishes.

They laid out the meal in Philip’s room, and lingered over it until eight o’clock.

“And now,” said the boy, “how about that rubber?”

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He felt as if the words were choking him. Every desire of his being cried out in wild protest against the thing he was so calmly proposing. What it was that made him utter the words he could not have explained. It was as if another personality, relentlessly determined, implacable, had hypnotized his will. He obeyed, fighting every inch.

Barry consented, dully, and they returned to the chess-board. Philip knew now how Barry must have felt when he said that he could kill him. He hated the man for chaining him thus to an ungrateful, torturing pastime, when love and pleasure and beauty were waiting for him in a room of flowery fragrance and magic light.

He heard the clock downstairs strike eight-thirty, nine, nine-thirty, ten, ten-thirty, eleven. With lips tight shut and beads of sweat on his forehead, he continued playing, while every now and then black shadows obscured the board from his view. And for another hour two human souls agonized in that upper chamber, wrestling grimly, death-grappled, each with his demon of desire.

The little clock below tinkled out midnight, just as the fourth game was completed. Philip put his hand suddenly to his forehead, sprang to his feet, reeled, and fainted.

In an instant Barry was bending over him, on the floor. He loosened the boy's collar, lifted him ten-

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derly to the cot, applied a wet towel to his forehead, and chafed his hands. It came to him with dismaying, humbling force that he had not suffered alone. Till that moment he had given no thought to his companion's state of mind. He had not noticed the killing tension under which he had been labouring. His own conflict had utterly absorbed him. He had even cherished a weak, peevish hatred against him for his interference, only conscious, at the instant, that he was being kept back from the thing he was famished to have.

But with this startling flash of perception, some life-long, rigid bar in his heart snapped in two. He buried his rough face in the boy's cold hands, and sobbed.

Philip opened his eyes wonderingly, saw the man kneeling beside him, and felt the hot tears on his fingers.

“Why,” he said, in a vague, uncertain voice, “I did n’t know I was such a fool as all this.”

Barry looked very far away to him, although he knew that he was by the bed, holding his hand. Everything danced oddly.

He heaved a deep sigh. “Did we beat ‘em, old man?” he asked.

Barry was patting his hand, awkwardly.

“Yes,” he replied, in a choked, unnatural voice, “we did.”

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Philip blinked, and shut his eyes again. "Gee, but I feel damned funny!" he said, faintly.

"I'm going to put you to bed right away," asserted Barry. "You have gone through more than your share to-day."

Philip's eyes opened in vague surprise. "Why, how did you know about that?" he inquired.

"Well, I should think I'd know, if anybody," declared Barry, with a smile.

"I never knew I'd told you anything about her," said Philip. "I did n't think anybody but myself knew about Katrinka."

It was Barry's turn to be puzzled. "Katrinka? No, I did n't know about that. I only knew about the other thing — the way you stood by me. Who's Katrinka?"

A great desire, which he suspected to be rather childish, came to Philip to confide in his friend. It seemed to him as if it would make things a great deal easier, somehow, now that it was all over. But a certain hesitation — a doubt, possibly, as to the delicacy of such a confession — still withheld him.

Barry must have noticed some sign of the repressed impulse, for as he unlaced the boy's shoes, he said, —

"It's hardly fair, do you think, for me to blab out everything about myself to you, and for you to be so damned close with your own affairs?"

Philip resisted the inclination no longer. Half an

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hour after he was in bed, covered up warmly, and dosed with hot lemonade by Barry's insistent hands, he was still deep in the story. A peace which he had not known for months had descended upon him as he proceeded, a gentle, pleasant lassitude, a deep, quiet satisfaction that things had turned out as they had.

Barry sat by the table, smoking, with his feet on the chair opposite, and interrupting every now and then with a question or a grunt or a comment. He found it difficult to believe the story he was listening to. He had not once suspected the fiery conflict that had been engrossing the boy's strength and courage for so long. It seemed very wonderful to him that one could suffer like that, and yet remain so gentle in spirit, so stanch and devoted a believer in the valiant ideals of our humanity.

When the recital was over, he went to bed himself. The room was perfectly dark except for a tremulous white patch that the street lamp below threw on the ceiling.

"It was out of friendship for a nameless drunkard," said Barry, "that you forced yourself to forego the other thing."

"I'm glad I stayed home," said Philip, with quiet, deep conviction. "I'm glad you gave me the chance. It was my chance to win out."

He felt very tired. It seemed to him that sleep would come soon and be pleasant.

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"I have always believed," said Barry, solemnly, "that the more closely you became acquainted with your fellow-men, the less you respected them. I've always seen a mask, and under the mask, ugliness and greed. I never suspected that one day I should come to reverence a human being. To-night you have brought me to that."

A boyish sigh of comfort and fatigue was the only answer. The next instant Philip was asleep.

XXIV

AFTER a quiet Sunday of rest, reading, and good talk, Philip went back to work again with restored body and mind. He even found himself looking forward with a certain pleasurable curiosity to his promised supper on Smilax Street. But an event of far more dramatic significance than a mere supper *en famille* was billed for special performance that week.

To Irene, Queenie, and himself, Fate committed the leading rôles, and they were played with admirable dash, energy, and emotional expression. The story is as follows:—

Philip was studying Tuesday evening in his room, when the whistle of the speaking-tube summoned him into the hall.

“Hello,” he answered.

Victorine’s voice came faintly but clearly to him from regions below.

“Is it Monsieur Philippe?”

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“There is a young person in the front hall who want much to talk with monsieur.”

“A young person?”

“Mees Muller, of the Institute, monsieur.”

“I’ll be right down.”

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He flung off his lounging-robe, donned a coat, and precipitately descended the stairs, wondering what in the world could bring Irene at this hour. She was standing under the gas-jet near the door, her small face turned upward, pinched and drawn.

“Oh, Mr. Wetherell!” she ejaculated, tragically, before he had reached the foot of the stairs.

“Has something happened?” he demanded, anxiously.

She wrung her hands and brought out the one poignant word, —

“Queenie!”

She appeared unable to say anything more for the time being, but stood there staring up into his face with an expression of supplication. Finally she seized his hand, and pressed it mutely between both of hers.

“Tell me,” he said, with quick sympathy. “Has something happened to her?”

She squeezed his hand still harder.

“Oh, — Mr. Wetherell!” she gasped. — “Oh!”

Despite the vagueness of his information, it was clear enough to him that some catastrophe had come to pass. His imagination was quick to supply shape and substance to it.

“Is it the thing you were afraid of?” he asked.

She nodded, blindly. “Death would be preferable!” she declared.

Her words had the unintentional effect of allaying

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his worst fears. If Irene could so well remember her footlights, Queenie could not yet be utterly beyond the reach of salvation. He subtly contrived to release his captured hand, and seated himself on the bottom stair.

“You’d better sit down,” he suggested, indicating the solitary chair against the wall.

She took it obediently, pressing one hand to her bosom.

“Oh, I’ve flown every step of the way,” she panted. “Heaven grant I may be in time!”

“Give me your news,” directed Philip, with some peremptoriness.

Irene turned wild eyes upon him. Her broad little nose was puckered with emotion.

“Run away!” she announced, with an accent of high tragedy. — “Our little Queenie!”

She buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed, unrestrainedly, in a very ecstasy of woe. For a season Philip, recognizing the futility of remonstrance, held his peace. But when two minutes or so had thus elapsed, and still no sign appeared of a shutting of the flood-gates, he ventured diffidently to interfere.

“We’ll never get anywhere this way,” he averred, robustly. “You’d better stop crying and think about business. How long ago did it happen?”

She withheld her sobs for an instant, and gazed at him through swimming eyes.

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"It ain't hap-p-pened y-y-y-yet," she brought out, chokingly.

"Well, well," rejoined Philip, in as comforting accents as he could command. "Then there must be a chance of preventing it."

Irene gave a desolate shake to her small head.

"I wish to Heaven I had your hopeful disposition," she said. "Seems like I always got to look on the dark side of things."

"Come," said Philip. "If you'll tell me all about it at once, we'll know better what's to be done."

"Oh, that's just what I come here for," agreed Irene, mopping her red eyes, and making a rueful effort to smile. "I says to myself, 'I'll fly to Mr. Wetherell. If any one can help me in time of trouble, it's him.' But oh, — oh, — I was 'most sick for fear you would n't have been to home. I don't know I'm sure what I'd have done then."

The young man's ear caught the sound of a discreetly turning door-knob on the floor above, where the redoubtable Jenny moved and had her being; and it occurred to him that the front hall was not the pre-eminently suitable place for so intimate a conversation.

"Look here," he broke in. "Why don't I run upstairs for my hat and overcoat? We'll take a little walk, and you'll find it simpler to tell me about things."

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"Oh, that would be just lovely," she said, gratefully. "I think I'd feel a good sight more at my ease."

He had got up to go; but she detained him still an instant, with an outstretched hand.

"Say, Mr. Wetherell," she asked, rather hesitatingly, "would you mind tellin' me whether my face has got all puffy from cryin' so?"

He accorded it a hasty critical scrutiny. "A little," he admitted, honestly. "But not nearly so much as the first time I saw you. Shall I bring down the talcum powder?"

"Oh, I'm afraid it would be too much trouble," she answered, with a look of longing. "You're terrible kind to suggest it."

Philip denied that it would be too much trouble, and a little later returned with the useful box. In five minutes they were on the street. She seized his arm, after her wont, and they turned eastward toward Greenwich Avenue. The night was foggy and mild. Without further parley Irene plunged into her tale.

"It's like this," she began, in a strained, rapid voice. "I did n't get away from the Institute till terrible late to-night, on account of havin' to do up a lot of extra typewriting for that monster of a Tibbs; and when I got home, ma was there all alone, — which was only what I'd expected, seein' it was 'most nine o'clock. So I was out in the kitchen huntin' around

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for something to eat, when ma pipes up from the other room, and says, —

“‘Little Queenie is n’t coming home to us to-night after the theatre,’ she says.

“‘No?’ says I. ‘And why’s that?’

“‘Why,’ says ma, ‘Gertie Beauchamp, her dear friend, has invited little Sunbeam to spend the night with her.’”

Irene’s hand gave a quick squeeze to her escort’s wrist.

“Mr. Wetherell, do you know anything about that Gertie Beauchamp?” she asked, raucously.

“Enough,” said Philip, “to be sure it’s a bad sign.”

“Oh! — that’s just what I said to myself,” went on the girl. “But though I was ‘most crazy with anxiety, I did n’t let on to ma, for fear she’d have one of her hysterics, and I could n’t get away. So all I done was to dash on my hat and coat and come along. If Queenie and Gertie Beauchamp are together some place, you can be dead sure they ain’t alone, and oh, —”

She broke off with a little gasp; and they proceeded a few steps in silence.

“And oh, Mr. Wetherell, I’m just frightened and worried to death. I’m sure Queenie’s been prevailed on at last by some of their fiendish arguments. I’m afraid she’s not going to hold on any longer. I just

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seem to know it in my bones; and if it's true, it will kill me dead."

Her dread was only too fully shared by the man at her side.

"Has she been around much with Gertie lately?" he asked.

"I don't know, Mr. Wetherell. She ain't talked much about her. She's been awfully sweet and nice to home. Oh, I'm afraid it was all a blind. I was too credulous. And yet it don't seem like she could be capable of such a thing. It's just those miserable, wicked men, Mr. Wetherell. If it was n't for the men, Queenie would n't never think of goin' wrong. She's so easily led, that's the trouble. I just know in her heart she don't want to be bad."

"Have you hit on a plan of campaign yet?" inquired Philip.

The girl shook her head.

"That's what I was countin' on you for," she said. "I've been so upset, I could n't seem to work my grey matter at all."

"Well," said Philip, "the first step is plain enough. We must find out whether she's at the show to-night."

They took the Elevated to Thirty-third Street; turned up into the glare of Broadway, and were soon approaching the theatre, in front of which an enormous butterfly, outlined in tiny, rose-coloured incandescents, was slowly fluttering its broad wings.

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"Let's not go to the stage door," said Irene, cautiously. "She might find out some one had been inquiring for her."

Philip purchased two balcony seats, far back, in M; and they hurried inside. The performance was already in the second act. The stage was dark, save for a mobile circle of blue moonlight, in the centre of which Mellicent Greeley, the star, was singing her famous waltz-song, "Why the Lover loves the Moon."

"Wait," whispered Irene. "The chorus comes in at the end of the verse. Then we'll know."

The moonlight followed the agile singer hither and thither about the stage with great docility, until she finally came to a halt, left front, clasped her hands, extended them with yearning, and waited. The whole stage suddenly became flooded with a pale blue radiance; the orchestra played a few connective measures with a softly pronounced rhythm, hung on the final throbbing note; and then, from the wings, entered a tripping procession of happy lovers, two and two, arms affectionately intertwined.

Philip's wrist was spasmodically clutched.

"Look! Look!" whispered Irene, dramatically. "It's her! Do you see? — next to the head of the line. That's Gertie in the lead."

The first move of the campaign was completed. What next? They sat there until the performance

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was nearly over, while Philip devised various schemes of procedure, and dismissed them one after another as preposterous. It came to him finally that it was perfectly useless to make plans. They must be ready to take whatever cue the occasion might offer. The one thing obviously essential was to keep Queenie in sight, to watch all her movements.

She would in all probability, he thought, be going out to supper somewhere with Gertie and two men as soon as the show was over. If it was true that Queenie had determined to go the whole figure at last, he felt confident that before the supper was over, she would be a little frightened. That would be their chance to surprise her. Philip dreaded the scene which his imagination only too easily conjured up; but this was no time for squeamishness, and he hardened himself against it.

"Let's go out," he suggested to Irene, shortly before the finale. "I want to talk things over."

The girl had forgotten even to unbutton her coat, despite the heat of the theatre. She jumped to her feet with electrical abruptness, and they made their way to the street. He took her into a drug-store, and while she nervously gulped down an egg-chocolate, he told her of the next move.

"I'm going to engage an auto," he said. "We'll wait near the stage door; and when they come out, we'll follow them. We've got to act cautiously.

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There's nothing to be gained by rushing things. It may be, you know, that we're mistaken."

"If we only was!" she exclaimed. "But oh, I know we ain't!"

Irene had reached the supremely dramatic moment of her eighteen years. She could scarcely speak for excitement. Philip put her into a taxicab, and gave brief directions to the chauffeur. He found some grim comfort in the memory that he had a week's pay snugly tucked away in his wallet.

They took up a position not far from the stage entrance, which was located on a side street; and the door of the cab was left open for the sake of unobstructed view. The crowds had begun to pour out of the second-balcony entrance close by.

"Oh, — oh!" gasped Irene, almost beside herself. "How much longer do you think it will be, Mr. Wetherell?"

In less than ten minutes the stage door began to be very busy. Women, closely muffled in evening capes and filmy scarfs, tripped out, escorted often by men in opera hats, who saw them into waiting cabs, entered after, and were driven into the rush of Broadway. Now and then a girl would come out alone, glance up and down the street, lift her skirts, and turn into the brilliant thoroughfare. Sometimes a friend would be waiting in the shadow, and quietly join her. The stage-hands and chorus-men came out, two and

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three together, laughing boisterously over some incident of the evening.

Suddenly Irene caught her breath. "Look! — Oh! — There they are!"

A party of four had crossed the sidewalk and were entering a handsome closed car. Philip gave the word to the chauffeur, and they were under way, close behind their quarry.

Irene held her hands rigidly clenched in her lap.

"Oh, you don't think he'll lose sight of them, do you, Mr. Wetherell? I think I would never get over it."

They turned up Broadway and crawled slowly, with many delays, northward. Philip's mind was rapidly running over the various possible destinations of the big green car ahead; but one by one, as they left Forty-second Street, and then Fifty-ninth Street, and then Sixty-sixth Street behind, the number was reduced, until, by the time they were crossing the Harlem Viaduct, he was completely at a loss. What could it mean?

Still the green car sped northward. Clearly it was bound out of town. With horror Philip realized that the chase he had so confidently undertaken might lead him fifty miles — very possibly more — up state. The snug little sum in his wallet dwindled pitifully in his dismayed estimation.

"Oh, where, where can they be taking her?"

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wailed Irene, through teeth that chattered. "I'm dead sure we can't keep up with them much longer; and it's so foggy you can't hardly see a thing ahead."

Philip set his teeth hard and resigned himself to the worst. They were speeding along a deserted stretch of the Boulevard, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Point Washington, when he became abruptly aware that the machine was slowing down. In another moment they had come to a halt. He opened the door and peered out.

"There's some sort of a breakdown across there," said the driver with a curt gesture.

Through the blanketing mist, vaguely illuminated by a sputtering street-light, Philip discerned the dark bulk of the green car, and the figure of a man kneeling in front of the cylinders.

"This is our chance," he muttered to the trembling girl at his side. "Are you game?"

"Y-y-y-yes," she returned, scarcely able to utter the word. "I am."

"Stay here," he directed, "until I've spoken to them."

He leaped out, and crossed the street to the green car. Without addressing a word to the chauffeur, he approached the door, and gave a peremptory rap on the panel.

There was a little burst of exclamations from inside, and then a man's face appeared at the glass.

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“Well,” he said. “What’s wanted?”

“I want to speak to Miss Queenie Muller,” announced Philip.

His ears detected a smothered “Oh!” which he seemed to recognize, and which reassured his failing confidence.

The door was flung open, and a large, rather fat man, with a heavy black moustache, made a quick descent.

“Who the devil are you?” he demanded. He was evidently very angry.

“A friend of Miss Muller’s.”

“There’s no Miss Muller in there,” retorted the man. “If you’ll take my advice, you’ll mind your own business.”

“This is my business,” cried Philip, with an oath. “I’ll take no lies from any one. I know she’s in there, and I intend to speak to her.”

His fists were clenched for a fight. He would have loved to knock the man down. He was confident he could. Another word of provocation, and he would have tried it.

But before the man could respond to his challenge, Philip became aware of a clutch at his arm.

“And this,” declared the voice of Irene, loudly, and shrill with excitement, “this is Queenie Muller’s sister, who has the right, if any one in the world, to speak to her. I demand to see her at once.”

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She advanced a step toward the black moustachio.
“Back from the door, I say!”

The man looked considerably astonished at being so impressively addressed; but he did not offer to move. At the same instant there was a cry from behind the closed door; again it flung open, and a figure closely muffled in a white fur cloak leaped to the ground. It was Queenie, hysterically sobbing.

The man wheeled upon her with a snarl of anger and disgust. “Here, you! Don’t make a fool of yourself. Get back inside.”

He seized her by the shoulders, and was roughly shoving her backwards, when Philip landed him a staggering blow on the side of the head.

“You dirty scoundrel!” he cried. “Take your hands off her.”

The man reeled over against the car, clutching the rim of the rear wheel to save himself.

“Ow!” he ejaculated.

He turned toward Philip, and made a slight placating gesture. “I say,” he brought out, “don’t do that, you know!”

Philip was so astounded at this reception of his violence that he could find nothing to say for a few seconds. An absurd desire to break out laughing came to him.

Meanwhile Irene had stretched forth her arms with a sob of yearning affection toward her sister.

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"Queenie!" she cried. "Little Queenie! We've come to take you home!"

The next instant they were fast locked in each other's arms. Hats were knocked sadly awry by the loving collision; but no note was taken of that by either of them.

"Oh, take me home," moaned Queenie. "I'm frightened. I want to go home."

"You shall go home," sobbed Irene, thumping her sister's back violently. "They shan't take you away: no, they shan't. So there!"

In the midst of his excitement, Philip found time to be thankful that they were upon an almost deserted highway, veiled by a kindly fog. Several automobiles had passed them, flying northward; otherwise there had been no external interruptions to the engrossing scene that was being enacted. He found himself wondering whether this were real life at all, so perfectly did it answer all the requirements of melodrama: the heroine and her sister sobbing profusely in each other's arms; the black-moustachioed villain looking on in cowed, angry silence, while the hero — Philip felt a little ill at ease in the noble rôle — stood by with clenched fists and flashing eyes, ready to defend at cost of life and limb the sanctity of the home and the honour of the innocent.

But the chauffeur of the green car crawled out from under the cylinders, where he had been lying,

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face upward, for several minutes; threw a couple of tools into the tool-box; readjusted the hood, and jumped to his seat.

"All ready, sir," he announced.

Another masculine voice called from the interior of the car,—

"Well, Rolly, if she's goin' to be such a puss, you'd better let her go. Come an' get in. I know where we can fill her place quick enough."

The villain snorted and produced a volley of oaths.

"Look a-here, Queenie," he ejaculated. "Don't be a snivelling baby. Come along. You're keeping everybody waiting."

Queenie released herself from her sister's embrace and faced him with tearful defiance.

"You can wait till to-morrer for all I care," she asserted, between sobs, with a dramatic wave of one hand. "I'm a-goin' home."

"I thought you was a better sport than that," declared Rolly, contemptuously. "If I'd known you was going to renig right in the middle o' the game, do you think for a minute —"

The rest was lost upon the retreating trio. The taxi-cab had already been headed for home by the diplomatic chauffeur. Queenie was half shoved, half lifted into it by her devoted sister; Philip exchanged a brief word with the chauffeur, then entered hastily himself, drew the door shut, and they were off.

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The sisters promptly fell into a renewal of their sobs and embraces. For a long time nothing was said. The lights of the city began to flash into view more numerously, more brilliantly. Again they fled across Sherman Square, under the Elevated; then the midnight flamboyance of Columbus Circle, with its rim of restaurants and cafés, burst upon them. They turned down Eighth Avenue.

“Will ma — forgive — me, — too?” asked Queenie, brokenly.

“Ma! Oh, gee!” exclaimed Irene, in dismay. “I forgot all about ma. She’ll be stark crazy wonderin’ whatever has become of me.”

“Why, did n’t she know what you was runnin’ off for?”

“No, I never says a word. I just clapped on my duds and hit the trail for Mullin Street.”

“Cheese!” said Queenie, aghast. “Ma’ll be in fits, sure. What’ll you tell her?”

Irene shook her head in momentary despair.

“She’ll see we’ve been bawlin’,” added Queenie.

The other contradicted her stoutly. “No, she won’t. Mr. Wetherell’s got some powder in his pocket. Here, I’ll do your face, and then you can take a try at mine.”

By the time they reached Smilax Street, the ravages of emotion had been considerably repaired; hats had been set straight, and veils readjusted.

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"You'd never guess a thing, would you, Mr. Wetherell?" demanded Irene; and Philip assured her that he never would in the world.

"But what are we goin' to tell her?" persisted Queenie, nervously.

"That's just what I'm givin' my mind to," replied her sister. "We can't tell her the truth, because it would bring on a palpitation, sure."

Queenie had the inspiration. "I know what!" she cried, joyfully.

But a sudden shyness seemed to hold her back.

"What is it, dearie?"

"If Mr. Wetherell would n't mind," parried Queenie, timidly.

"Oh, I'm sure he would n't. Would you, Mr. Wetherell?"

"Oh, no, not at all," replied Philip, loyally.

"I thought," said Queenie, "you could tell her Mr. Wetherell had asked you to invite me to go for an auto ride with him to-morrow afternoon, and you thought you'd ought to tell me about it to once so that I would n't be makin' some other engagement."

"Oh, that's just fine!" cried Irene. She grasped the cue, and hurried on with the narrative. "So when I got to the theatre," she supplied, "I found that poor Gertie was terrible sick; and we've been lookin' after her together ever since, takin' her to the hospital, and all that, you know."

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"It's sort of a whopper," said Queenie, dubiously.

"It's because we love her so," responded Irene, sententiously. "We would spare her from needless suffering."

"And if she does think we've been cryin', it'll be because we was both so terrible worried about poor Gertie," added Queenie. "And of course that knocked out the invitation for to-morrow afternoon. But just the same it was awful kind of Mr. Wetherell to ask me; and I'll be very glad to accept some other time."

"That's good," said Philip, properly.

Queenie's thoughts had suddenly been deflected. "Say, I wonder what Gertie 'll say to me to-morrow night. She'll be sore as a goat. Well, I don't know as I blame her."

At the door of the tenement they left him.

Irene wrung his hand adoringly. "I won't ever forget it, Mr. Wetherell, as long as I live!"

Queenie also wrung his hand. "I never, never can thank you half enough," she declared, humbly. "It's you and Reny that have saved me."

Her words lingered in his mind as, alone in the now historic taxicab, he was borne swiftly homeward.

"Saved her!" he repeated to himself, with a cynical amusement that was strangely mingled with pity and doubt. "Saved her!" — Yes, till when?

XXV

WINTER had again manacled the hill-country. Its glittering spears were hung along the lofty eaves of Highstone. The vines of the porch, outside the Colonel's window, were sheathed in brittle armour. It was the bitter season's last battle for supremacy.

Colonel Raeburn's chamber was very quiet. The March afternoon was nearing dusk. The fire in the wood-stove crackled softly. In a neighbouring apartment steps could be heard going to and fro. There was no other sound in the great house. The Colonel lay as motionless in his bed as if wrapped in profound sleep; but he was wide awake.

His hollow eyes stared fixedly at the high, water-stained ceiling. There was an expression in them of unspeakable melancholy. The expression rarely left them nowadays. It seemed to indicate a dreary pre-occupation of spirit; it had become an obsession.

Persistent, unrelieved, tyrannically engrossing, it had wrung his daughter's heart a thousand times during the past months. She had grown afraid of it. It was an alien, hostile thing that had taken her father in thrall. He was no longer himself. He was dying—she had learned to endure that thought with fortitude and resolution; but he was dying

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under a blighting cloud of misery and despair which she could not understand, and which cruelly vitiated for her all the daily offices of love. Once her devotion had brought her an incalculably rich reward; of late, though she could not bear to confess it to herself, she felt in it only the contagion of her father's gloom. She could not shake it off. She found herself constantly hungering for fresh air and the solitude of open country, freedom at any cost for a little time from the haunting presence. In such brief hours of release she regained courage to return to duty with a smile.

At the sound of a door shutting heavily the Colonel turned his head slightly on the pillow and breathed a profound sigh. He reached out his emaciated hand to the little bell that stood on the chair by the head of the bed, and rang it. A woman of advanced middle age appeared in the doorway.

“Did you ring?” she asked.

“I thought I heard some one coming in,” said the Colonel, feebly.

“It was the stable-boy. He came for the milk-pail.”

“Did she say how long she expected to be out?”

“No. She spoke of taking a short walk, I think. She said she was a little tired and wanted some exercise. I dare say she'll be back any minute now.”

The Colonel sighed again.

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"Is there anything you want?" suggested the woman, kindly.

"You might bring me a little glass of water, Min. There isn't anything else."

She disappeared. The Colonel pressed his hand to his forehead as if to allay some throbbing pain, and in the solitude a low groan escaped his lips.

"I must tell her to-night," he muttered, dully. "She can go to-morrow. The next day she will be back again."

Aunt Min returned with the water, and lifted his head while he took a sip of it. The Colonel was quite helpless. He did not chafe any longer against staying in bed.

"Thank you, Min," he said. "And when she comes, please tell her I wish to see her."

"She always comes directly to your room," replied the woman, as she left him. "But if I see her first, I will tell her."

Again silence fell. The Colonel was painfully intent upon the passing of the minutes. How slow the time went by! How long it seemed since Georgia had gone out! She must be taking a very long walk.

He shivered. The thing he had to say to her lay like a cold, crushing weight on his heart. How could she bear it? Would it be the end of her love for him? He had tried to tell her before, and she had frightened

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him silent, with her pleading words, and her look of solicitude and adoration. He had not had the courage to go on.

But it could be no longer put off, now; else he might die with the curse on his soul. He might die any minute. He might die even before Georgia came home. Death had knocked imperatively at his door only three days before, and had scarcely been persuaded to delay still a little longer. The Colonel had prayed God, with agonizing supplication, that a few days might still be granted him. To-day he felt well enough to say what must be said. The moment had come.

The front door opened, and Georgia entered the house. He heard her lay off her wraps in the hall; counted the seconds while she gave the rearranging touch to her hair before the tall mirror under the staircase; shivered as her steps finally approached his chamber.

“How’s the father?” she inquired, with a gentle lightness of manner which she never permitted to desert her. “Did he get a little nap?”

He answered her in a feeble negative. How beautiful she was, he thought, how proudly self-confident, how faultlessly, splendidly loyal in her devotion to him. A tall, gracious flower she seemed to him, shedding beauty and perfume in the garden, tragically unconscious of the whirlwind about to sweep

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upon it and which would fell its proud crest to the earth.

"I'm going to change your pillow, daddy," she said. "I have a nice fresh one here that will feel good, I know."

She slipped her hand gently behind his shoulders, lifted him, and deftly made the substitution.

"There," she said. "And now would you like me to light the lamp?"

"No, not quite yet, Georgia. Shut the door, will you, and sit down. Sit there by the window, will you, not too close to me."

The girl obeyed him silently, enveloped by a strange dread. She felt that some terrible crisis was lying in wait, just behind the trembling, half-transparent barrier of the minutes.

The sick man sighed drearily. "I have not long to live, Georgia. I do not know how long; but I have besought God in his mercy to spare me until, with your help, I have lightened my spirit of the curse that has blasted it. Will you strive to remember, while I discover to you the blackness and great darkness of my soul, that the man who addresses you is already sealed with death, and that if anguish and torments of spirit can in any sort atone for sin, he has paid the price, lo, these many years? — Will you strive to remember that, Georgia?"

"I will," she answered, faintly.

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“Do you recall the occasion of Philip Wetherell’s last visit in this house — the night before Thanksgiving?”

“I do. I remember it very, very distinctly.”

“Will you open the top drawer of the dresser and take out the letter-box that lies on the left-hand side?”

Mechanically she obeyed.

“Will you open the box and remove the crumpled sheet of paper that lies on top?”

She followed his direction.

“Do you recognize it?”

She stepped to the high window for additional light. A low, smothered cry escaped her.

“It is the man who lived in the next room to him,” she exclaimed.

“It is my son.”

She made no movement. An icy, death-like hand seemed to have glided up her spine, freezing sense. She understood nothing. A blank, white silence invaded her mind.

“I — I don’t know what you mean,” she said, at last, in a weak, puzzled voice. “I can’t seem to understand very well.”

She put damp fingers to her forehead, and tried to think clearly. What had her father said? “My son”? But he had no son. Her brother had died thirteen years ago. There had been no other children.

In the silence she heard herself babbling foolishly.

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"Arthur is dead, father," she was repeating. "Arthur is dead. He died thirteen years ago next month. He was only twenty-one years old. Even if he were living, he would not be so old as this man. There must be some mistake."

With limbs that quailed oddly under her, she returned to the dresser and replaced the crumpled sheet of paper, noting mechanically for the first time that its edges had been charred. She remembered that Philip had thrown it upon the hearth.

"This man," rejoined her father, in a pitiless, desolate voice, "is the offspring of sin. He does not bear my name. But he is my own child."

Georgia leaned weakly against the tall dresser. She remembered her father's groans in the dead of night. She remembered the momentary seizure he had had: — ah, it was just as they had been talking of this man. She had attributed it to fatigue and excitement.

"Are you sure?" she asked, still staving off the ultimate fact.

The man in the bed groaned. "Utterly," he replied. "Philip offered details which put the truth of it beyond a peradventure."

"What details?" she demanded. "I do not remember any."

"That he was a naturalist. That he was born in Maryland. That he was singularly reticent as to the facts of his history."

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"I do not make anything of all that," said the girl.

"I have told you this much, only that I might tell you more," responded the Colonel. "If you will sit down again, I will not keep you long in suspense."

She resumed her chair. The room was nearly dark. She turned her face toward the window, and gazed out upon the heavy, ice-hung vine, and beyond, into the shadows that had gathered densely under the tall trees.

"Do you recall what occurred to me after the battle of Antietam?"

"To be sure I do," she replied, with strained volubility. "You had a slight flesh-wound of which you said nothing. When the regiment was transferred to the heights above Harper's Ferry, you marched with your company. On the way you fainted; and they left you at a tumbledown little farmhouse. You were sick there."

He interrupted her. "There were two persons in the family."

"An old woman," she supplied, dully, "named Granny Creeling, and her daughter, Judy."

"Judy Creeling was the mother of my son."

There was a long, crushing silence. Georgia felt as if the soul had suddenly been torn out of her and flung into a pit of quaking darkness. Why—this was a

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story she had repeated a thousand times. It had been among her most precious possessions. The names of Granny Creeling and her daughter had come fluently, glibly from her lips since early girlhood. Ah, — and after all, — it was nothing but a story of shame. Was all the nobility of life nothing but a story of shame? Was there nowhere, then, the honour and integrity of soul she had always so proudly imputed to her life's idol? All her life she had worshipped at this shrine — worshipped there the more proudly, the more inveterately, when everything else had failed her — and now, the shrine was empty. A death's-head grinned at her from the altar whereon she had lavished the choicest offerings of her heart's devotion.

But the dreary voice from the bed was going on.

“She was a broad-spoken, illiterate country girl, with a sort of florid beauty that came from work in the hayfields and the garden. When I began to get better of my fever, her mother left me entirely to her care, while she was away, often for entire days at a time, with a load of vegetables. We were both young; once the thought had awakened in us, there was no putting it out of mind. I do not know whether repentance ever came to her or not; I know that to me, thenceforth, from that day of sin, my life was accursed. When I found out, after my return to camp, what fruit our guilt was to have, I resolved that I would number myself among those slain in battle.

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For three years I courted death, flung myself upon it, — only to be remanded, at last, to a life that has been a living death: a slow, incurable mortification of the soul. God willed that I should be punished by my life."

"Did mother know?" asked Georgia, in a voice that had sternly subjugated pain and horror.

"I never told her. Till this moment I never told any one. But I think she knew. She said something in her delirium that led me to believe that she had known it for a long time, and kept silent."

Georgia shuddered and buried her face in her hands, making no sound. There were no tears in the emotion that racked her. It was dry, cruel, irreparable — a general uprooting of all that she had most honoured and cherished.

The darkness had deepened in the lofty apartment. She suddenly threw back her head and stretched out her arms with a gesture of hopelessness and barren sorrow. But her lips, opened to a cry of anguish, gave no audible betrayal of what destruction the whirlwind had wrought. Very quietly she asked, —

"What happened to Judy?"

"I never saw her again. For years I sent money to the old woman for her. Then I found out that Judy had married and gone somewhere up the Shenandoah. The old woman had been using the money for liquor. The boy, who had been left with her by Judy, had

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run away, and for years I could get no track of him. It was not until eighteen ninety-five, when I saw in a newspaper, among the number of those who had been accorded degrees at his university, the name of John Creeling, that I knew whether he were alive or dead. I did not know then whether it were truly he or not. The inquiries I made convinced me. That was the year Arthur died."

The girl's eyes burned and tingled with dryness. She shuddered at the knowledge of what her father had suffered; but there was no pity in her breast. He had wrought the iniquity: he had yielded the penalty. What lighter fate could he have asked for or desired?

"From that time," pursued the Colonel, in the same monotonous voice of hopelessness, "I watched his every movement. My only son! With what pride and with what agony of shame I followed his progress, always secretly, always in silence, disguising my purpose. He was a brilliant scholar; an audacious, atheistical thinker, reverencing nothing, unloved by his fellows, but universally admired for his superior intellectual gifts. I found his picture in a magazine, cut it out, and put it away under lock and key, not daring to be found with it, because of the resemblance it betrayed to my own face. Six years ago he was appointed to an assistant professorship out west. I heard a rumour that he was drinking heavily. Then he

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disappeared. The theory was that he had committed suicide. That was three years ago. Do you remember the name Philip called him by?"

"No," answered the girl, apathetically. — "Murray? Mowbray?"

"Barry," said her father, "John Barry. He is evidently living in deliberate obscurity. I have thought that perhaps he might be seeking to rehabilitate himself. Philip told us he worked in some laboratory. I know nothing beyond that. I did not see Philip again. I have been too ill to set on foot any inquiries."

There was a long silence. The room had grown chilly. The girl rose, with a shiver, to her feet, and lighted the lamp. She opened the stove-door, and threw in two or three pieces of wood. Her movements were perfectly automatic.

The man in the bed uttered a groan. — "Georgia."

"Yes, father?"

"Do you know why I have made all this confession of shame to you after so many years of silence?"

She gazed at him vaguely. "No, — no, — I had not thought of that, yet."

"Do you recall what I asked you to bear in mind while I spoke to you?"

"Yes, father."

"Does it make no difference in your feeling?"

Her mind groped blindly for an answer. "It only

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makes it all seem the more terrible. Perhaps it does something besides that. I don't feel sure yet."

The Colonel groaned again. "Georgia! *Daughter!* Have you no pity? Have you no softness? Is there naught of woman in your heart? Do you desire me to enter into my grave with the curse still upon my soul?"

"What can I do to take it off, father?" she asked in an altered voice. "You must know I would help you if I could."

By a relentless effort of will she was holding herself from yielding to paroxysmal sobs. She felt all the wild, primal impulses of woe in her: to tear her hair, to shriek aloud, to rend her garments, to fling herself upon the ground. But she sat quite motionlessly in her chair, making no sound, while her fingers played vaguely with the chain of her watch.

"My son is in New York. We know where he lives."

"You want me to get some word to him?"

"I want you to go to him and beg him, on your knees, to forgive me. I must have his forgiveness before I die. I cannot die without it. This is my last request of you, Georgia."

She rose and readjusted the wick of the lamp. She made an effort to speak; but her tongue refused to move. She swallowed hard, and made another effort.

"When do you want me to go?"

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“I want you to go to-morrow morning by the early train. You will not need to be away but for one night. You will bring me word the second day. You will tell me that he has granted me his forgiveness.”

“I will go,” she said, quietly. “I will do the best I can.”

XXVI

SHE reached the city early in the afternoon. She went directly to a quiet hotel on Irving Place, where some years before she had stayed for several days with her father. Since then she had not been in New York, and the roar of its traffic, the flux and confusion of its heedless multitudes, enhanced her feeling of solitude and helplessness. The errand upon which she had been sent appalled her. She was totally unqualified for it. In vain she sought words for the fateful interview. The shadowy spectre of the man she was to face — to kneel to — stood ever in her mind and put rational thought to flight.

Her plan was to go first to Mullin Street, and from his landlady to secure his business address. It was well after three o'clock before she reached the house. Economy had restrained her from hiring a conveyance. More than once she had lost her way in the network of irregular streets west of Greenwich Avenue, and had been compelled to solicit the good offices of policemen. She was very tired. At last she espied the sign of the New York Institute of Auto-health. As she mounted the steps, an unbidden thought flashed into her mind and made the hand tremble that reached for the bell-pull. This was where Philip lived!

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She waited a short while, two minutes, possibly, and rang again. She heard the sharp, impetuous summons of the bell far in the interior of the house; but it was not answered. Her heart sank within her. She tried a third time.

A window opened in the Institute, and a young woman with a pug nose and a pompadour thrust out her head.

"I guess there ain't nobody to home," she observed, sympathetically.

Georgia turned a hopeless look upon her. "I wanted to see the landlady," she said.

The girl in the window surveyed her pale, high-bred face with interest.

"You mean Mademoiselle?" she asked. "Oh, she's likely to be in and out all through the day. You just ring the basement-bell, and I guess one o' the old folks 'll let you inside to wait."

Georgia thanked her, and observed her direction, while the pompadour looked on with friendly solicitude.

"She so rarely has any visitors," she explained, affably. "I suppose that's why."

After a brief delay the basement-door was slowly opened, and a very aged man appeared behind the grating.

"Ees it something de lady desire?" he inquired, in a thin, quavering voice.

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"I wanted to see the landlady," replied Georgia.

"De landlady? But dat's my daughter, mees. She ain't at her home just now. She gone off some place; I don' know when she be back again."

He seemed about to withdraw into the house with a vague, apologetic smile, when the pompadour interrupted.

"It's only some little errand or other, ain't it?"

The old man advanced his wrinkled face till it touched the grill, and peered upward.

"Good-day, mees! Yes, mees. Some little errand. I t'ink she want some chicorée for the salade. She might be home any time. She don' tell me about dat."

"Well, you'd better let the young lady in," advised the girl. "She can sit down and get warm. Say, it certainly is cold as the dickens, ain't it? — Yes, sir, right away!"

The last remark, in a very different tone of voice, seemed to have been addressed to some one inside. She shut the window abruptly and disappeared.

The old man put out a shaking hand to the knob, and opened the gate a little crack, with a look of immense caution.

"My Victorine tell me not to let nobody inside; but I don' t'ink she know a fine young lady would ring de bell."

With some difficulty and considerable inward hesi-

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tation Georgia passed through the narrow aperture afforded, and entered the dark basement-hall.

“Mademoiselle will like to come in and get warm?” he asked, with diffident hospitality. “My old woman and me, we be all alone. I don’ t’ink Victorine care very much if you come in de kitchen.”

He led her dodderingly into the rear apartment, where an old-fashioned range, set deep under the chimney-hood, displayed many ruddy chinks. A most savoury-smelling kitchen it was, spotlessly clean, floor, table, and sink attesting to much vigorous scrubbing. The girl did not at once notice a tiny, white-capped old woman, deep-buried in the recesses of a padded arm-chair in the corner.

“Dis be my ole wife, mees. We come from the ole country, us, — Rouen, mees. Was you ever hear talk of Rouen? It is a city ver’ magnifique.”

The old woman had risen, and made a quaint little curtsy.

“Mademoiselle will tak’ a seat, yes?” she said, in a chirping, friendly voice.

Upon a sudden, grateful impulse Georgia drew a chair beside her and sat down. Something of the dread that crushed her seemed, for the moment, to be lifted by the gentle, unaffected cordiality of her reception. Beside the old maman’s chair, in front of the gleaming range, with its softly humming kettle, shut off even from the sounds of street-traffic, she had the

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sense of being secure, for a little interval, from the terrors that preyed upon her. It was like one of the fleeting spaces of sunshine and warmth that sometimes come in the midst of a day of low-hung, tempestuous clouds.

A yellow kitten with a green ribbon round its neck rose from the hearth, where it had been napping, stretched itself, and walked noiselessly across the room, rubbing familiarly against her skirts. She picked it up and caressed it, delighting in its soft, responsive purr.

“Well, well,” exclaimed the old man, who was looking on with interest from his chair beside the stove, “how it be true, *hein*, as they tell, that a hani-mal know his friends. When our Victorine come in — pouf! — ze kitty always run off some place.”

“Do you know our Victorine, mees?” inquired Susanne.

“No, I do not,” she replied. “But I have heard of her.” The words brought her an odd little pang as she uttered them.

“There is a woman for you!” asserted the papa Victor. “Wonderful for keeping the house; a veritable marvel to cook; always, always making her economies. — But she is, perhaps, a little too severe, sometimes.”

He affirmed the criticism with a dogged nod or two, while he took a small pinch of snuff.

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"Ah, but you are too ready to find fault, my Victor," put in Susanne, soothingly. "Torine is very good to the old ones. What do you expect, then, my man? Life is not easy. You must have a little patience."

"Nevertheless, she might not refuse to let me go to the corner for a little glass, sometimes. Even at my age, I could enjoy that."

Susanne sighed, resignedly, offering no protest. To change the subject was more profitable than to argue.

"And again," she went on, with a confiding look at the girl beside her, "our Torine cannot endure hanimals. I do not know however Monsieur Philippe persuade her to keep dis cat. It was sick once; but now it is well."

"I know how!" said the old man, sagaciously. "He persuade her wiz money. Victorine cannot refuse dat."

"Monsieur Philippe has a love for his animals of the most devote," pursued Susanne, sociably. "He is a very nice young man."

The papa Victor interrupted with an air of authority. "Mademoiselle does not know Monsieur Philippe, my Susanne. You are talking about things she cannot understand. That is not the way."

Susanne turned a humble, apologetic look upon the guest.

"You must excuse a poor old woman," she said,

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plaintively. "I do not remember very well. Monsieur Philippe has been so kind to us, you see. He give me this lovely rosary for the Christmas."

She fumbled for her treasure in a pocket, and displayed it proudly. "Monsieur Philippe is the kindest young man I ever know. Even Victorine confess dat."

The girl had bent her face down close to the kitten's silky fur. Its gentle purring did not cease. She felt the warmth of its body through her clothing. An emotion of longing which she had no power to repress flooded over her.

In the presence of the new, pitiless, heart-slaying disillusion, the shattering of her life's idolatry, the offence that he had committed against love seemed curiously unimportant, almost trivial, to her. It was the first time such a thought had been admitted to her mind.

She was quick to realize what had evoked it: her loneliness, her helplessness. She reproached herself for it. Because she was in trouble, because life had led her within the doors of its charnel-house and displayed to her the livid horrors concealed there, now she would forget! But the nature of his offence was in no wise altered. If she had condemned him for it once, when she was strong, what excuse other than weakness could she offer, were she now to relent toward him? Weakness and humbled pride — were these arguments?

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She raised her head again, and occupied her hands in rebuttoning a glove; but she did not put the little visitant from her. It still lay there contentedly in her lap, looking up at her with grave, inexpressive eyes.

"I t'ink I hear our Torine," said the old papa, suddenly, as there came a rattle at the basement-gate, outside.

"I mus' go let her in," he added, getting to his feet and making what halting speed he could out of the room.

"Oui, — oui, ma fille," he called, quaveringly. "Je viens. Me voilà!"

The kitten jumped abruptly from Georgia's lap to the floor, and sought the shelter of the dark hall. Susanne nervously set her cap a little straighter, and sat forward in her chair, in an attitude of expectancy.

"Now you are going to see our Torine," she whispered. "I hope she will not be severe with the poor papa."

Georgia heard some low words interchanged at the gate; and then Victorine entered. Before she could say anything, the girl had risen and made her apology.

"I trust that I have not done wrong in intruding so unceremoniously," she said. "But I was most anxious to see you as soon as possible."

Victorine nodded, without smiling. "I understand," she rejoined. "And what is it I can do?"

Her disposition was clearly not of the most cordial.

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She did not sit down, nor even remove her gloves. Georgia also remained standing. The two aged ones sat silent, with rather guilty looks, in their chairs.

“I have a very important communication,” said Georgia, “to make to Mr. John Barry, who, I understand, lodges with you. I came here to secure from you, if you would be so kind as to give it, his business address.”

“But I do not know it,” retorted Victorine, coldly. “I do not know anything about Monsieur Barry. I have not the least idea of his business.”

Georgia could scarcely credit her ears. She had counted upon this first step as the easiest and most secure of all. But if she could not go to him, what was there left but to wait for him to come to her? Philip might come, too. He might find her waiting. Dismay seized her at the mere thought of such an encounter.

“Ah,” she cried, “then you cannot help me?” There was an unintentional accent of supplication in her voice.

Victorine studied the girl’s face skeptically. She had her opinion of unknown young women who came to the door with inquiries after men-lodgers. Even the little cry that had escaped her at the discovery of Victorine’s inability to be of service was susceptible of a certain interpretation.

The girl had an intimation of the ground of the

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other's hostility. She saw that she must say more, or lose everything.

"I have come to-day," she said, appealingly, "from my home in Connecticut, over a hundred miles away, to bring Mr. Barry a message from my father, who is dying. It is a matter of life and death. I have promised my father to see him. And to-morrow I must return to his bedside."

The appeal was not lost upon Victorine. The noble, candid beauty of the girl's face, and the look of desperation in the deep eyes completed the conquest.

"Indeed, mademoiselle," she responded, "if I had the address, I would give it to you. But I have not. What then? — I will tell you what I will do. Monsieur Barry always comes home at quarter past five every night. I will be listening for him, and will tell him a message from you. Mademoiselle is doubtless at a hotel in the city?"

The girl nodded. "But I am afraid he would not come to me," she said. "He does not know who I am. He has never seen me."

"No?"

Victorine's small eyes opened wide in an astonishment that was not without a revival of suspicion.

"I cannot explain to you," said Georgia, beseechingly. "I must ask you to trust me. I must wait here until he comes."

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“No one shall say,” asserted Mademoiselle, “that Victorine La Bergère is not ready to help those in trouble. I will do what I can for you.”

“Ah, dat is good, my Torine,” put in the old Susanne. “I am sure you will not be sorry for dat. Life is not too easy for any of us. We must do what we can.”

“I suppose you wish to see Monsieur Barry alone?” asked Victorine, meditatively.

“I must see him alone.”

“I have not any sitting-room,” explained Mademoiselle. “Upstairs, in the extension, I have a little room for sleeping. There is nothing else. I think it would be decent, if you did not object.”

“Oh, you are kind,” exclaimed Georgia, reckless of everything except the opportunity afforded. “It will do perfectly, I am sure.”

“You will be waiting there,” said Victorine. “And when he arrives I will send him to you.”

Georgia wrung the woman’s hand gratefully. “I shall never forget this act of generosity,” she said.

The old Victor had risen from his chair, and came forward with some ceremony to wish her farewell.

“Good chance, mees!” he said, with a bow that had in it a pathetic reminder of the grand days of the Café Antoine. “You will still find the happy times.”

She went quickly to the old maman, and took her

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shriveled little hand, a bird's claw, in her own. Susanne looked up wistfully into her face.

"It is a mission that the good God approve, mees?" she asked.

Georgia nodded, blindly.

Susanne lowered her voice to a timid whisper. "I am going to say a rosary to your intention. Perhaps that will help, who knows?"

The girl could make no reply. She gave a quick pressure to the small hand, and darted from the room after Victorine.

She was led up a narrow, dark flight of stairs, and shown into a rear chamber. Mademoiselle lighted the gas.

"It is all I have," she said. "I am sorry."

She hid away a pair of bed-slippers, drew a screen in front of the washbowl, and straightened the heavy, quilled counterpane on the four-post bed in the corner.

"And now," she said, "I am going to leave you. You will not have very long to wait, — half an hour, perhaps. I will be watching for him, I promise you."

Without waiting for any further words of gratitude, she quitted the room.

The girl sat down in a narrow, high-backed chair, by the wardrobe, facing the door. Her mind was a chaos, in which a single fact stood out with preternatural definiteness: that at the end of a half hour, perhaps sooner, perhaps later, the door would open,

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and the man would be standing before her. How he would condemn her when he learned her business! What means had she of appealing to him? What reasons could she urge in behalf of her strange request?

None! None! She could only throw herself upon his pity. She could only humble herself before him, suing like a criminal for mercy. She had always prided herself upon the rationality of her relations with others. She had been scrupulous to yield what they might rightfully expect from her. She had demanded from them only what she had a right to demand.

She was now about to demand a boon which was completely outside the high pale of justice. Arguments could not help her. There were none. She was unsupported. Her mind groped, and lost itself, in this alien, dim-lighted territory where reason must be left behind. She was very frightened.

She heard a clock upstairs tinkle out five strokes. Fifteen minutes more! Then the door would open. The spectre would be on the threshold. She would have to speak. Her mind was vacant and staring. She grasped the arms of the chair with damp fingers, and waited.

XXVII

At twenty minutes after five Barry entered, closing the door behind him. He had not taken off his faded overcoat. His slouch hat hung in one hand.

“You wished to speak to me?”

His question was put in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone. There was no look of surprise or curiosity in his haughty features; but he fixed an intentive, undeviating scrutiny on the girl’s face, which almost put to rout her courage. At the first sight of him she seemed to know that her mission would be in vain.

She rose from her chair, holding lightly to the back of it with fingers that trembled. Her first words had been given her by her father.

“Professor Creeling?” she asked.

She did not fail to note the almost imperceptible start and recoil, instantly controlled, that caught him at the name. He smiled deferentially.

“I fear there must have been some error,” he replied. “I was informed that you wished to see Mr. Barry. Miss La Bergère evidently misunderstood.” He bowed with unrelaxed dignity, and turned to go.

“Mr. Barry,” she called, with an arresting gesture, “it was indeed you for whom I made inquiry. I bring

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you a request from a man who lies on his death-bed. You will not refuse to listen to me."

He faced her again. She detected a slight stiffening of his neck and shoulders.

"You speak very strangely," he observed. "I do not know any man who could have death-bed favours to ask of me."

"Colonel Raeburn, of the Grand Army of the Republic."

She named the regiment of Connecticut Volunteers in which he had held his commission.

"I know nothing of any such man," responded Barry, coolly.

"Until after the battle of Fredericksburg his rank was that of captain."

Again Barry shook his head, tapping his knee impatiently with the crown of his hat.

"After the battle of Antietam," went on the girl, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, yet unnaturally distinct, "during a fever, he was cared for in a small farmhouse that stood on the line of march to Harper's Ferry."

A slight, sudden lifting of the hands was the only sign he gave of having understood her.

"A house that belonged to an old woman," he supplied, in a cold voice.

She nodded. "An old woman and her daughter were the only inhabitants."

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“Well, and what is your message to me?” he demanded, as if desirous of making a peremptory disposition of the affair in hand.

“My father is dying. For forty-five years he has suffered the tortures of remorse and shame. He has sent me to you to beg your forgiveness. He cannot die without it.”

“Cannot?” retorted her auditor. “That is too bad.”

“Surely,” she cried, “you cannot wish to make his sufferings still more terrible by refusing this boon.”

“May I inquire,” asked Barry, ignoring her remonstrance, “how it comes about that after these forty-five years of paternal pangs, he happens to be informed of his dearly beloved son’s address?”

“I am prepared to tell you everything,” replied the girl, simply. “Shall we sit down?”

She resumed the high-backed chair.

“No, thank you, I don’t care to sit down,” he rejoined. “But you’re quite welcome to do so.”

He locked his hands behind him, and began pacing back and forth from one end to the other of the room. Every now and then he would abruptly halt at one limit of his confine, lean for a few seconds against the wall, and cross his arms haughtily in front of him, his head thrown back. During the course of her long recital, he made no comment.

She told him how her father, for years after Judy’s

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marriage, had continued to send sums of money to the old woman for the child, until he learned of the boy's flight. She told of his futile efforts to get a clue to his son's whereabouts, and of his final rediscovery of him, through the newspaper item. She dwelt with impassioned volubility upon the yearning interest with which he had secretly followed his career, of the pride he had felt in his brilliant success, and of the dismay with which he had learned of his strange disappearance.

"He assumed, as the rest did, that you had taken your own life," said Georgia.

She had talked rapidly, breathlessly, whipped by excitement. She had the cruel intuition that she was failing utterly, that she had made no slightest impression upon his sympathies. The arrogant backward thrust of his head, the undisguised curl of the lip, the cold, unrelenting gaze of the dark eyes, brought to her soul terror and despair. Her words seemed to be sent out against an unhearing, stony barrier. They fell back upon her, faint, ineffectual, stricken with death.

"As winsome a tale as one could ask to hear," observed Barry icily, with crossed arms, as she paused. "Courage, and nobility, and a sensitive regard for honour and justice — how admirably Colonel Raeburn's history exemplifies all these!"

The girl rose hotly to his taunt. "You shall not

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assail his character!" she cried. "I grant you that it bears this single dark stain; but aside from that, it is the noblest, truest, bravest character in the world. My father was worshipped by his subordinates in the army; he was accorded the United States Medal of Honor for acts of signal courage; he has held a position of high respect and dignity in his town and native state; his name is synonymous, and justly so, with those very qualities which you so impertinently deny him."

She stood before the man, quivering with anger and defiance. He extended a calm, placatory hand.

"And doubtless," he observed, with cutting composure, "if *all* the facts of his career were known in his home town, he would be held in still higher esteem."

She fell back with a low cry of mortification, and sank into her chair.

"You forget, Miss Raeburn," he went on, remorselessly, "that so far as your present auditor is concerned, only one little episode in your worthy father's career has the least interest or significance. His nobility of soul, his piety, his patriotism, I have no reason to doubt; I do not doubt either that he has suffered many painful moments of regret for his little escapade with poor Judy Creeling —"

"Regret!" she interrupted. "It has killed him."

He granted the point with a slight movement of deference that seemed to mock her fever.

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“But how, may I ask, does all this concern me? Only one fact concerns me, — that, thanks to him, I was ushered into this fair world with a curse upon me. His fond paternal solicitude, of which you make so much, never did me one jot or one tittle of benefit; I was alone, unbefriended, hated, despised, an outcast from my birth. Whatever place I finally succeeded in winning for myself, I won alone, by unceasing, ruthless struggle, against odds insuperable. My first conscious thought of the man who begot me, an accident in his pleasures, was a thought of hatred and contempt. Nothing that you have yet told me leads me in any respect to revise that thought.”

“But I have not finished yet,” cried the girl, in a voice of despairing supplication. “You will not refuse to hear me to the end.”

She knew that nothing she had still to say might be expected to move him, when she had come so far, and only encountered failure. But she could not yet give up.

“I have still to tell you,” she urged, vehemently, “about these last months. Surely, surely you cannot be without pity when I tell you of his broken spirit, of his agonies in the night, of the black cloud that has settled upon him. The thought that his son is yet alive, and that the curse of that son’s hatred is following him to the grave devours him unceasingly. Since he learned, some four months since, that your

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sudden disappearance, three years ago, was not the end, he has not known a moment of peace."

"I fear that it will avail you but little," said Barry, with a caustic smile, "to bring your report down to date; but at least it will then have the merit of completeness agreeable to a scientific mind like mine; and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your best to soften an obdurate and deeply embittered nature."

"It is not easy," began Georgia, with a sudden access of timidity that strangely altered her voice, though her resolution never flinched or wavered, "it is not easy for me to tell everything; but I am going to be absolutely frank with you; and if you think it indelicate of me to be so personal, I only hope you will appreciate that the story cannot otherwise be made coherent."

"Go on," he said, once more commencing his caged movements up and down the room.

"It was the evening before last Thanksgiving," she said, "and a young man, who was a very dear friend of mine, was making us a brief visit. He was employed in an architect's office in New York, and had lodgings in this house."

She paused a moment to gather courage. The man had suddenly ceased his pacing, and stood stock-still, watching her. She knew that he was watching her: she felt his gaze; but a weight on her eyelids

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seemed to render it impossible for her to look up into his face. Her neck and cheeks mantled with self-consciousness. The room was so still that she heard for the first time the breathing of her auditor.

“My father, who has been an invalid for a considerable time, was very much entertained by — by our guest’s — skill at making little impromptu sketches of the various occupants of the house where he lived. He drew several — the landlady, her old father and mother, and a young woman named Jenny — I do not recall who she was — and finally a hasty profile, with which he was not satisfied, of his fellow-lodger. The resemblance to my father’s features struck me at once; and I began, out of aimless curiosity, to ask questions about him. The answers to these questions and to a few others, put by my father with what appeared to be a perfectly casual interest, gave him the information that has led finally to my errand. But at that time I had not the least —”

Her listener interrupted her with a gesture of impatience.

“No matter about that,” he directed. “I want you to tell me something further of this friend you have mentioned. You say he *was* your friend. Do you mean that he is not, now?”

She raised her eyes to him for the first time since entering upon this most difficult stage of her recital. He was looking at her with consuming attentiveness;

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the cold, contemptuous expression had vanished from his features. He appeared to be hanging upon her answer. She could not understand it at all. But the instinct that tutors suppliants to grasp an advantage too slight to be perceptible, even, to others, impelled her to indulge his curiosity, at whatever cost to herself. The present was no moment for reticence. Her father's soul might be the price. If her stern judge showed any least hint of relenting, she had no right to withhold aught from him.

"No," she answered, candidly. "He is not my friend now. We parted the next day. I have not seen him since, nor do I expect to see him again."

"He had offended you in some way, I take it," pursued Barry, mercilessly.

Her pride rose fiercely in revolt against the insolence of the man's curiosity; but she quelled it, answering him again with unflinching directness and honesty.

"He had not been true to me."

"You mean that he had become entangled with some other woman?"

Tears of hot indignation rose into her eyes. She clutched her resolution desperately.

"Only the previous week he had — been with her. Then he came to me."

"Oh, I see. He told you nothing of it all. He made a secret of it. You found out by some accident."

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She grasped the arms of her chair to brace herself.
“On the contrary, he told me everything.”

Looking into the man’s face through tingling eyes, she saw a triumphant smile upon his proud lips. She could bear the torture no longer. Again she sprang to her feet, aching with rage, her fists unconsciously clenched.

“What *right* have you to look at me like that?” she cried. “Have you no regard for a woman’s feelings? Does it delight you to see me suffering?”

The man stood back imperiously, and raised his gaunt hand with a silencing gesture.

“Philip confessed everything to you, and begged you to forgive him. He offered every reparation in his power; and you hardened your heart against him. You come to me suing forgiveness in the name of a man who has hidden his guilt until the grave is about to close over his head, who has lived a lie for half a century. How do you reconcile, may I ask, these two courses of action? Either you are not in earnest about your father, or you must admit to having worked a grievous wrong to the man who loved you, who — as I know well, though he has never mentioned your name to me — loves you now, better than his life. What is this forgiveness you talk of?”

He stopped, with an extended hand that called upon her for an answer. She was silent, staring at him blindly, her jaw slightly dropped. He folded his arms

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once more, and leaned against the door, watching her inflexibly out of denouncing eyes.

Seconds passed before she could find words; and even then they were only words of evasion.

"I do not understand," she protested, weakly, "why you should so concern yourself with my private affairs."

She realized the cowardice of her feint; but she had been brought to bay. She knew herself without further resource. Her response was nothing more than a vague, meaningless contortion of spirit, like the death-throe of some beautiful creature of the deep, cast by the tide upon a rocky shore, vainly struggling to return to the element that can sustain it. Georgia made this final blind effort to recover herself, and failed. Before the words were out of her mouth, she knew that she had put herself in her antagonist's power. But she was totally unprepared for the flaming invective which he poured out upon her.

"Your private affairs!" he cried, scornfully. "*Your* affairs! And pray what makes them yours? Are they not equally my affairs, concerning as they do the one being in the world whom I love? The man you have cast off as unworthy your exquisite, dainty purity and blameless virtue is the man who has gone down after my soul into its black pit of despair and darkness, and who, at the price of his heart's blood,

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has borne it back into the light of day. Thanks to him, and to none other, I am rescued from a curse that has been a thousand times worse than death.

“Who warmed me with his own body when the chill of the pit was upon me? Who welcomed my hatred and my curses when the craft of the fiend had shut up my reason and turned me into a starving beast? Who trampled underfoot, for my sake, the most seductive and tyrannical desire of youth, that he might stand by my side when the battle was desperate? The man whose touch brought soilure to your fair white hands.”

The girl buried her face in terror as his denunciation was heaped upon her. She felt herself being annihilated with the thunderbolt. A paroxysm of fear shook her. She did not raise her head, when he paused; but she heard his panting breath close above her, and her muscles quivered and stiffened like those of an animal who sees the whip raised for the punishing stroke.

“Somewhere in the Bible,” resumed Barry, more quietly, but with bitter incisiveness, — “a book which I assume you are more familiar with than I, — there is a passage about judgment, and sheep on the right hand, and goats on the left. Do you, by any chance, recall the strange words which the Eternal Arbiter pronounces to the sheep?”

His voice assumed a prophetic fervour, so like her

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father's in its tones, that it struck her with an uncanny dismay.

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in!" cried Barry, solemnly. "Naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.— In prison! — In *prison*! — Ah, it was he, it was Philip, who had the key to my prison, and who flung wide its door. So long as I possess his love, I shall be free!"

The girl could no longer support her anguish. The strength went out of her quailing limbs; she sank to the floor, reaching forth her hands, vaguely, with blind supplication toward the knees of her judge.

"I have done wrong," she moaned. "My heart has been hardened with pride. Oh, — have pity!"

There were tears in his own eyes, as he lifted her to her feet. The flame of anger had died out of him at the sight of her humiliation — proof uncontrovertible of the nobility and truth of her soul.

"If I have been cruel," he said, in an altered voice, "it is because the boy is very dear to me, and because I long to see him happy. You are the only one in the world who can make him happy. For the salvation of his own honour and integrity, he has broken the net that bound him. If ever a man's hands were clean, his are. His soul is starving and crying out for you."

She gazed up at him with swimming, doubtful eyes.

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"Do you think he will forgive me?" she asked.

"He believes that he has nothing to forgive. He has never had one thought of blame for you. — Will you tell your father that he has my pardon, fully and freely offered, and that he owes it not to any deserts of his, nor to the unflinching devotion of his daughter, nor to anything in heaven or earth except my boy?"

Georgia reeled, and caught herself by the corner-post of the bed. Had she heard aright? Had he truly uttered the words that, but a few minutes before, had seemed as far and unrecoverable as the voices of Creation Day?

"Did you give me a message for my father?" she gasped. "Did you say you would forgive him?"

The man smiled at her with a lofty illumination of visage that she would never forget the splendour of.

"I did; and I said that it was for Philip's sake."

She sat down weakly on the bed, and buried her face on her arm, against the footboard, overcome by uncontrollable sobs. The man watched her for an instant only; then quietly withdrew from the apartment.

He went up two flights of stairs, and knocked at the first door. A voice bade him enter.

Philip had just come home from work, and was washing his face at the washbowl.

"Hello, old man?" he said, blinking. "How goes it?"

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“Fine,” replied Barry.

He seated himself familiarly on the table, and calmly took out a stogie from an inner pocket. As he lighted it, he said, —

“Do you want to do something for a person who needs your help?”

The boy was vigorously towelling his face. He looked at Barry in amused consternation.

“I hope it’s not a girl,” he said, with a wry smile.

“I won’t tell you who it is,” said Barry, mysteriously. “All I can tell you is that it’s a case that requires your help — that no one can help but you.”

“What can I do?” demanded Philip.

“You can put on your collar and coat as fast as you damned can; run down to the ground-floor; and knock at the door of the extension chamber.”

“Go on!” asked the boy, gasping. “Are you in earnest?”

“I never was more so,” replied the man with an inscrutable smile. “There’s no time to be lost. Explanations can be deferred till later.”

Philip followed directions wonderingly. He could not conceive what singular vagary had seized his neighbour. The extension chamber! But that was Victorine’s room. Could she have been taken ill? Was she in some trouble? But why was this business for him, and no one else?

“Well, here goes, old man!” he announced. “If

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it's a put-up job, why, you catch it later; that's all."

He hastened down the two flights; he stepped shyly to the extension door, and knocked. A faint voice, that somehow awakened vague thrills of memory in him, told him to enter. He turned the knob timidly, opened the door, went in, and shut it softly behind him.

XXVIII

BEFORE March was out, the Colonel had been gathered to his fathers. His last weeks were serene. Georgia was constantly at his bedside. Death no longer appeared to him in any other guise than that of a welcome release from life's weariness. No curse was following him into the dim land beyond the crossing. His daughter's devoted ministrations evoked no bitterness or humiliation of soul. She knew the worst; and still she loved him. For the first time since his young manhood he knew the comfort and peace of an affection founded on truth.

It was moreover an immense joy to him to know of the relation that obtained between Philip and the girl. At his explicit direction, she had given him all the details of her interview with Barry, holding nothing back out of any fallacious desire to spare him possible mortification; and he knew not only what he owed to the young man, but also the reason for the debt. For the first time, as well, he learned something of the tragic events of Thanksgiving Day.

"I sacrificed to my pride," she said, "the richest privilege of my life. It was left to a flighty little chorus-girl and to his fellow-lodger to give him the help he needed."

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They had many talks together in the quiet of the Colonel's chamber. They opened to one another, as had never before been possible, their inmost hearts. Each had quaffed to the last drop a dark cup of suffering; to each had been accorded a new and exalting vision. Reticence was unnatural, full communication imperative, with the love of the years behind and the day of ultimate separation so close ahead. The sweet solemnity of those weeks sank deeply into the fabric of the girl's being, staining it with a richer, more royal hue than any it had before revealed.

It was not until the middle of April — more than a fortnight after Colonel Raeburn's death — that Philip was able to leave town. He came out to Highstone in the early afternoon, and they took a long walk together through familiar woods.

In the woods of mid-April, life and death, dissolution and growth, oblivion and promise, find a mystic intermingle and fusion that tutor the susceptive spirit to new faith. The earth is still cold; remnants of the winter's snow linger on the northward side of each little ledge and boulder; everywhere is the sound of drip and trickle and ooze. The buds on the ash trees and the beeches are swollen; here and there a swamp-maple has begun to veil itself in faint scarlet; rusty catkin banners are half unfurled in the alder thickets; but still there is no green, no open declaration, no panoply of the oncoming season. The naked

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branches overhead still rattle in the wind. There are no songs amongst them. Underneath, the dead leaves lie thick.

Yet it is just here, under the very pressure of this mantle of death, that the new spring is teeming. Her first shy children have been brought forth, sweet pledges of affection, fragrant gages of the multitudinous beauty held in store. What an inexpressible delight, like the first kiss of love after long absence, to discover, under the decaying leaves of the previous year, the small, pink, waxen clusters of the arbutus, distilling an ambrosial perfume.

On the edge of a piece of timber-land, above the second pasture, a well-remembered haunt of other springs, they had found it that afternoon, dearest flower of all to the children of New England. A little deeper within the covert of the woods, amid rocky clefts, they had surprised the pale liverworts, and the tender, spirit-white blood-root, ichor-nourished, still clasped in its natal sheathing-leaf.

It was a day of lowering clouds and rising wind; and before supper was ended, a pelting rain had set in. As they sat alone, later, before the open fire in the library, they heard the storm moan and whine about the lofty eaves of the house. The invalid chair had been removed. Georgia was in black. Her face had grown pale under the fatigues of the long winter; but it wore an expression of serenity which was new to it.

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She sat in the deep arm-chair; and at her feet, on the hearth-rug, sat her lover, his head against her knees, one of her hands clasped along his cheek, and pressed, at times, caressingly to his lips.

The fire flashed fitfully in the gusts of the storm. Now and then a splash of rain would be flung against the tall window. There was no sound of life in the great house.

Georgia remembered how, as they had made their way homeward, that Thanksgiving afternoon, it had seemed to her that there were no other living beings in all the world but they two. Now, once again, they were alone together. But how different the solitude!

An unspeakable gratefulness, that brought the mist to her eyes, welled up in her, as she listened to the dismal mutterings of the storm, that she had Philip again. Together! — Ah, nothing else seemed to matter any more.

She wondered how she had ever been able to carry her burden through the barren, despairing months without him. She ran the fingers of her uncaptured hand gently through his gleaming hair. If he were to be taken from her now! — She shuddered.

The man at her feet shuddered responsively, — had some kindred thought perhaps at the same moment fled across his own mind? — and pressed her slim fingers to his lips. It seemed a promise, more potent than words, to assure her.

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Ay, let the storm rage as it would! She cared not. With her hand in his, what was there to affright? With his arms to comfort and cherish, how could she be dismayed?

And for him? — Her heart was confident. He knew that she needed him. Ah, she had not let him guess that before. Her pride, her jealous independence had blinded her own spirit and dulled her perceptions. She had not known even — until too late — that she needed him. But now! — he had come to her when she had been crushed and fainting and forspent with anguish, and she had given herself to his strength. He would never forget that. He had never been disloyal to this deepest instinct of his being, an instinct that had sufficed to tear him from the nets of enchantment, and set him upon his feet, even when love had withdrawn its offices of aid.

No words were spoken between the two. But the silence was full of voices. The storm without, the dark night, and the glowing, faithful fire were speaking. A thousand memories — memories shared by both, memories unshareable — were speaking. A presence felt, though not to be perceived by the outward eye, was delivering its solemn exhortation. The strong brown hand that held the white one so tenderly, reluctant ever to release it, was communicating a world-old, new-born mystery, far beyond the compass of utterance.

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When so many voices were to be listened to by the spirit, some still understood but dimly, others entertained by perceptions love-tutored to their message, words of mortal speech could seem but a desecration of the timeless silence.

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

